

The Appendix

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A new journal of narrative & experimental history

Illusions





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The Appendix

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The Appendix is a quarterly journal of experimental and narrative history; though at times outlandish, everything in its pages is as true as the sources allow. *The Appendix* solicits articles from historians, writers, and artists committed to good storytelling, with an eye for the strange and a suspicion of both jargon and traditional histories. A creature of the web, its format takes advantage of the flexibility of hypertext and modern web presentation techniques to experiment with and explore the process and method of writing history.

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Benjamin Breen



Note on the Cover:

This photograph was taken in *Appendix* editor Ben Breen's grandmother's front yard in Scituate, Massachusetts. It depicts two moments in the exact same place: one, pictured in the black and white photo, depicts the photographer's father and aunt circa 1962. The other was taken with an iPhone in August 2012.

Letter from the Editors

Issue Two: Illusions

The fellow is distract, and so am I;
And here we wander in illusions.
-Shakespeare, *A Comedy of Errors*

In his book *Hallucinations*, Oliver Sacks recounts a vision brought on by a high dose of morphine in 1965. Noticing “a sort of commotion” on his dressing gown’s sleeve, Sacks discovers a “microscopically detailed battle scene” with “tents of different colors ... gaily caparisoned horses, soldiers on horseback,” and music from silver pipers. He had read Froissart’s *Chronicles* and *Henry V* before shooting up, Sacks recalled, “and now these became conflated in my hallucination. I realized that what I was gazing at from my aerial viewpoint was Agincourt, late in 1415.” Sacks lay gazing at this illusory scene for twelve hours, enraptured—and tricked.

Anyone who casts a glance backward into the past risks a similar delusion. We see history in our minds’ eyes, listening for its voices, hearing its music. But is it the real thing?

This, the second issue of *The Appendix*, gives history’s illusions their due.

Some illusions we create to survive. Our Open Source starts us off with the memoir of a seventeenth-century Basque woman who, rather than spend her life in a Spanish convent, dressed as a man and spent years marauding in South America, fighting Indians and seducing other

women. In another article, a French antiquarian sells faked “crystal skulls” from Mexico on both sides of the Atlantic, then stumbles when people doubt the real skulls he has to share. And in one of this issue’s feature pieces, Tina Post digs into the “phantom punch” that Muhammad Ali may or may not have laid on Sonny Liston; that Ali may or may not have learned from the controversial actor Stepin Fetchit; that takes Post back to herself, and the moves black Americans learn so as to hide and fight in plain sight.

Other illusions—those of societies or governments—claim our wealth and labor, make us disappear, strike us from the record. This month’s Local History spotlights a Scottish town named Drumnadrochit, whose past is overshadowed by a certain nearby loch-based mythical monster. Elsewhere, Maggie Greene travels backwards through a Chinese ghost play that questioned corrupt rulers, mourned the dead of Mao’s Great Leap Forward, and led to playwrights being branded non-persons, or “ox ghost-snake spirits.” Lisa Smith’s discovery of an early modern spell-book evokes a past when the edges dividing ‘reality’ and magic were beginning to show. Amy Reading reveals the early twentieth-century department store window displays that were meant to empty pockets, but enchanted their creators instead.

In creating and tracing illusions, we risk being caught ourselves. This is the danger of history,



Pere Borrell del Caso, *Huyendo de la crítica* [“Escaping Criticism”], 1874, via Wikimedia Commons.

the fantasy of the archives. The traces we follow were created by men and women—but mostly men—with agendas very different from our own. Historians once limited themselves to determining which source was more trustworthy; which fact more true. Did the archives show that a ruler had killed thousands? Or was that just a misguided rumor from a ‘bandit’ people that shouldn’t be trusted anyway? Having sorted the ‘facts,’ the historian was free to move on.

Taking a cue from anthropology, literature and journalism, historians today are more open to the possibility that archives lie, that insights can be gained from these lies, and that what we seek in our investigations changes us—and sometimes even the historical record itself. This issue, Matt Gildner excavates a pernicious theory from late nineteenth-century Bolivia that suggested that Atlanteans, not Indians, built one of South America’s greatest archaeological sites—an idea that Nazis occultists loved. Douglas Hunter tries not to get lost in the crisscrossing paths of English explorers searching for a spectral Northwest Passage. And in our interview with writer Jackie Sibblies Drury we discuss her latest play, in which a troupe of well-meaning actors try to tell the story of the Herero genocide in southwest Africa using inadequate German sources, but get caught in America’s racial history instead.

Sibblies Drury’s play is also an example of how modern illusions, or fictions, can sometimes be our only way to capture the more personal truths of history. We’re honored this issue to run an excerpt from Katherine Marsh’s *Jepp, Who Defied the Stars*, a young adult novel that amplifies the story of a real-life dwarf who worked in the late sixteenth century laboratory of Tycho Brahe. In our Not-So-Funny Pages, Andrew Cohen uses the tricks of sequential art to chop up time, running it forward and backward from a particularly powerful moment in the life of another American boxer, the ex-slave Tom Molineaux.

Chronology isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.

This was a fact that Herodotus, the ‘Father of History,’ already recognized in the fifth century BCE. “Very few things happen at the right time,” he observed, “and the rest do not happen at all. The conscientious historian will correct these defects.”

Except that Herodotus didn’t write that. Although the quote has been widely attributed to him for over a century, it actually issued from the barbed pen of Mark Twain, who falsely ascribed it to the learned Greek in 1905.

It’s a reminder that we need to be wary when we venture into the past, where we risk not only the delusions of our mind’s eye, but false sources and the confusion of overlapping events as well. The three combine, create new stories, figments of figments, which we then force into narratives. We run them against each other, and in their collision hope for something like truth.

Perhaps the past we collectively create is at its core unknowable—the group hallucination into which our present continually recedes. But perhaps it’s also the realest illusion we have.

We leave it for you to judge.

Your Appendix co-founders,

Benjamin Breen
Felipe Cruz
Christopher Heaney
Brian Jones



Letters to The Appendix

Welcome once again to The Appendix letters page, where we offer letters from the past. In honor of this issue's theme, we've found a few that touch on illusions personal and public, artificial and as real we make them.

As always, we hope they inspire you to write letters of your own—to The Appendix and to parties deserving and otherwise.

—The Editors

“OPTICAL ILLUSIONS,” *The Mechanical Engineer*, New York, September 6, 1884, p. 212.

EDITORS—I don't know if your articles upon “Optical Illusions” are particularly instructive to the majority of your readers, but they were very interesting to me for they revived reminiscences of the past.

Many years ago when I was an apprentice, a strolling fakir had occasion to visit the shop where I was employed to get a little job done. If I remember rightly it was a screw to be fitted to an automaton. While waiting for the job the magician amused and astonished the apprentices by performing before their verdant eyes wonderful feats of legerdemain. He apparently swallowed nuts and bolts with lightning dexterity! I attended several exhibitions that the wizard gave and among the many tricks were numerous experiments in electricity, such as the glass clock dial, bell, and strong box. His mechanical experiments consisted of the suspension, inexhaustible bottle, automaton peacock and harlequin, etc.

The performances caused an intense excitement among the workmen and apprentices in our Shop, who were all anxious to know “how the thing was done.” Among the boys in the shop was a smart lad who allowed his

curiosity to get the better of his judgment. He resolved to find out how the magical apparatus was constructed. While his companions were asleep this lad fitted keys to the building where the apparatus was kept. He entered unobserved and examined to his heart's content the wonderful mechanism that had created so much excitement. In attempting to leave the building he was detected and arrested. His motive was not for gain, but only an intense desire to see how the thing worked. He was placed under bonds to appear when the court called him, but that day never came, for, by the advice of his friends and relatives who knew the circumstances of the case, he departed for the West, where, by his own exertions, he has now a position of trust and responsibility, and is to-day the master-mechanic of the largest road out of Chicago.

I have no doubt but that he reads your articles, or ought to, and I often wonder if he recalls to mind the youthful days when he wanted to be a magician.

JOHN H. MALLOT



"VOICE CASTING," *Nature*, April 20, 1911, p. 244.

"In *NATURE* of April 15 and October 21, 1909, I described various experiments with the gramophone ... As listening to music so reproduced is a kind of auditory illusion, any contrivance that will heighten the illusion may be expected to give more pleasure if the illusion is of the right kind. Usually one feels a sense of unreality in the music apparently rising from the bottom of the 'horn,' more especially in listening to a human voice. To get rid of this, I angle the horn, as shown in the figure, so as to reflect the sound waves from a tin reflector (parabolic in character) so placed as to send the sounds to the other side of the room. One then ceases, while listening, to think of either the gramophone or the horn, as the sounds come from the reflector, and the effect is much more real and natural."

JOHN G. McKENDRICK

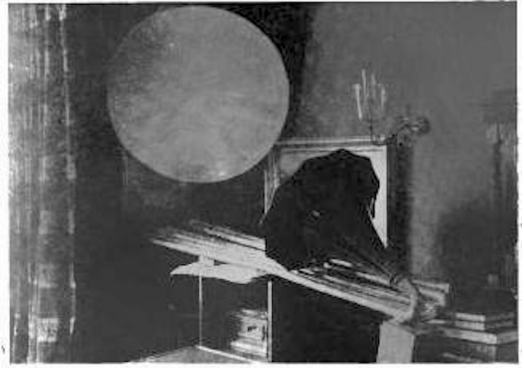


"CHEERS AND BOOS," *The Afro-American Ledger*, Baltimore, Maryland, 17 August, 1940.

Dear AFRO: The AFRO's August 10 editorial onslaught against passé preacher-politicians and politicianer-bishops was as timely and accurate as your New York staff man's report of the cheese-swinging melees of big-time Democrats was inaccurate, at least in one instance.

For, Dr. Silas F. (not B.) Taylor and Shag Taylor of Boston are one and the same fellow.

RIENZI B. LEMUS, Washington, D.C.



"I WISH TO THANK," *Dodge County Republican*, Kasson, Minnesota, Thursday, March 17, 1949.

I WISH TO THANK Mrs. Kathryn Wilcox and Mr. I. Fenne for the mercy they showed me when they found me in Kasson and I had fallen among thieves, which had stripped me of my raiment and wounded me and departed, leaving me half dead, and passed by on the other side.

Mrs. Wilcox and Mr. Fenne when they saw me, bound up my wounds with kindness and took me to the Inn, but the Priest and the thieves were going to take me to the insane asylum. Blessed are they when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

St. Matthew 5th chapter 11th verse.

It isn't what people think of us, It is what God thinks.

Mrs. W. J. CAMPBELL, Rte 2, Kasson, Minnesota.

Lieutenant Nun

Michele Stepto and Gabriel Stepto

In this issue's Open Source, we bring you an excerpt from the fascinating memoir of la Monja Alferéz, the Lieutenant Nun. In 1600, a young novice named Catalina de Erauso fled the Dominican convent in Basque Spain, cut her hair and disguised herself as a young man. She started a new life on the road. In this rebirth, she was no longer Catalina, but Antonio or Alonso Diaz, and on another occasion Francisco. She was no longer a nun, but rather a traveling soldier, merchant, muleteer, gambler, murderer and conquistador. She spent her years traveling throughout the Spanish American empire, going as far south as the Chilean frontier, where the Conquest still raged against the Araucanian Indians.

Catalina's memoir, skillfully translated by Gabriel and Michele Stepto, reads like a grand, picaresque adventure, and her hinted romantic exploits with other women have only added to her legend as a transgressive transgender hero. Her translators carefully note, however, that Catalina must be understood in terms of her causes, not ours: Catalina's focus was on being a Spanish man, a soldier. As Michele Stepto puts it in her introduction to the translation:

It would be a misreading to see her as anything other than the perfect colonialist, manipulative, grasping, and at moments out and out bigoted. To align Catalina, as a cross-dressing "other," with the victims of colonialism is to miss the truth that the rewards of her transformation were gained almost wholly at their expense.

Nevertheless, that transformation was no illusion. Was Catalina's secret revealed? Her memoir is filled with nailbiters where she is almost discovered, but ultimately Catalina revealed herself. After almost dying in a swordfight, she confessed her secret to a bishop. Two nuns confirmed her gender and declared that she remained a virgin. Contemporary readers might expect punishment to follow. Instead, she presented



Portrait of Catalina de Erauso, circa 1626,
by Juan van der Hamen

her memoir to the king, Phillip IV, who rewarded her with a pension for her services to the crown. She then presented herself to Pope Urban the Eighth. Instead of chastising her, he gave her a papal dispensation to keep on dressing as a man—provided that she remained a virgin. Catalina de Erauso, or Antonio, or Alonso, or Francisco, was last seen in Mexico, running mules.

Without further ado, we present a taste of the Monja Alferéz's unique seventeenth-century story. We highly recommend Gabriel and Michele Stepto's translation of the rest of her incredible tale, *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite* in the New World.

Chapter One

Her country, parents, nativity, education, flight and travels in various parts of Spain.

I, doña Catalina de Erauso, was born in the town of San Sebastian in Guipúzcoa province, in the year 1585. My parents, Captain don Miguel de Erauso and doña María Pérez de Galarraga y Arce, were native-born residents of the town, and they raised me at home with my brothers and sisters until I was four. In 1589, they placed me in a convent of Dominican nuns there in town, San Sebastian the Elder, with my aunt doña Ursula Unzá y Sarasti, who was my mother's older sister and the prioress of the convent. There I lived until the age of fifteen, in training for the day when I would profess myself a nun.

In the year of my novitiate, toward the end of it, when I was about to make my final vows, I got in a quarrel with one of the sisters, doña Catalina de Aliri, who had entered the convent and taken the veil after the death of her husband. She was a big, robust woman, I was but a girl—and when she beat me, I felt it. It was on Saint Joseph's eve, March 18, 1600, when the entire convent rose at midnight to perform matins, that I went into the choir and found my aunt on her knees. She called me over, handed me the key to her cell and asked me to fetch her breviary. I went after it, unlocked her cell door and grabbed up the breviary, and seeing the keys to the convent dangling from a nail on the wall, I left the cell open and returned the key and the breviary to my aunt.

The nuns were singing the psalms in a mournful tone, and when they got to the first lesson I went to my aunt and asked to be excused, telling her I was sick. She touched her hand to my forehead and said, "Go on, go to bed." I left the choir, took up a lamp and returned to my aunt's cell. I took a pair of scissors and a needle and thread, I took some of the pieces of eight that were lying there, and the keys to the convent, and I left. I went opening doors and closing them carefully behind me, and when I came to the last one I shook off my veil and went out into a street I had never seen, without any idea which way to turn, or where I might be going. I struck out, in what direction I cannot say, and came upon a chestnut grove just

beyond the walls, on the outskirts of the convent grounds. There, I holed up for three days, planning and re-planning and cutting myself out a suit of clothes. With the blue woollen bodice I had I made a pair of breeches, and with the green petticoat I wore underneath, a doublet and hose—my nun's habit was useless and I threw it away, I cut my hair and threw it away, and on the third night, wanting to get as far from that place as I possibly could, I set off without knowing where I was going, threading my way down roads and passing villages, until I came to the town of Vitoria, some twenty leagues from San Sebastian, on foot, tired, and having eaten nothing more than the herbs I had found growing by the roadside.

I entered Vitoria without the least idea where to put up, but it wasn't more than a few days before I met a certain doctor of theology, don Francisco de Cerralta, who took me in without any fuss, despite the fact that he didn't know me, and even gave me some new clothes. He was married, as I soon discovered, to yet another of my mother's sisters, but I didn't let on as to who I was. I stayed there what must have been three months, and the Doctor, seeing that I read Latin well, took a fancy to me and got the idea in his head I should continue my training as his student. When I let him know I wasn't interested, he pleaded and insisted and finally went so far as to lay his hands on me.

With this, I decided to leave—and that is exactly what I did. I relieved him of some few *cuartos* I found lying about the place, and when I found a driver headed for Valladolid, I struck a deal for twelve *reales* and set out with him for that city, which is about forty-five leagues away.

The Court was in Valladolid at the time, and it wasn't long before I found work as a page with the King's secretary, don Juan de Idiáquez, who immediately dressed me up in a fine new set of clothes. There I went by the name of Francisco Loyola, and for seven months I did very well for myself. But at the end of that time, one evening when I was standing in the gate with one of the other pages, who should arrive but my father, asking whether Señor don Juan was at home. My friend responded yes, the don was at home, and my father told him to tell the don he was there. The other page went inside and I was left there with my father. The two

of us didn't speak a word to each other, nor did he recognize me, and when my friend returned to say he might go in, my father started up the stairs, with me following along behind him.

Don Juan met him at the top of the stairs, embraced him warmly, and exclaimed, "Señor Captain, how good of you to visit!" From the way my father answered, the don could tell there was some trouble, and dismissing the person he had been seeing he came back and sat down with my father and asked him what the story was. My father explained how his daughter had run away from the convent, how he had searched high and low for her, and how it was this very thing that brought him to Valladolid. Don Juan showed his deep concern on account of the grief it caused my father, and his own fondness for me as well—and there were other things too, the matter of the convent, which his ancestors had founded and of which he was now a patron, and the town itself, of which he was also a native.

I had listened in on the conversation, and when I heard the anguish in my father's voice, I backed off slowly and slipped away to my room. I got my clothes and some eight doubloons I had squirreled away and made my way to an inn, where I slept that night, and caught wind of a driver leaving the next morning for Bilbao. I settled on a price with the man and left the next day, with no better idea of where to go, or what to do, than let myself be carried off like a feather in the wind.

It was a long road to Bilbao, some forty leagues I imagine, and at the end of it I could find neither inn nor private lodging, and was at my wit's end. Before long, I managed to attract the attention of some of the town's youths, who encircled me, edging up closer and closer, until finally I had had enough and picked up some stones and let one of them have it—where I cannot say, because I didn't see. I was arrested and thrown in jail, and there I remained for one long month, until the boy I had hit got better and I was set free, my pockets several cuartos lighter for the cost of my stay.

From Bilbao, just as soon as I was let go, I headed for Estella in the province of Navarre, which must be about twenty leagues off. I found work there as page to don Carlos de Arellano, a native of Santi-

ago, and remained in his house and employment for two years, well-fed and well-clothed. But at the end of that time, with no more reason than that it suited me, I quit the comfort of this situation and returned to my hometown of San Sebastian, ten leagues away, where I remained completely unrecognized, a well-dressed young bachelor.

One day, I went to hear mass at my old convent, the same mass my mother attended, and I saw that when she looked at me she did not recognize me, and when the mass was over and some of the nuns beckoned me into the choir, I made like I didn't understand, and with a bow here and a fine word there slipped out the door. This would have been at the beginning of the year 1603.

From San Sebastian I travelled to the port of Pasajes, a league away, and there stumbled upon one Captain Miguel de Berroiz, who was about to embark for Seville. I asked the man to take me with him, we settled on a price of forty reales, I went on board, we set sail, and before long arrived in Sanlúcar. I disembarked and went off to see Seville, and though I liked the place and thought about staying on for a while, in the end I was only there for two days, and then returned to Sanlúcar. There I met up with a Captain Miguel de Echarreta, a native of my own province. His ship was escorting the galleons of General don Luis Fernández de Córdoba, part of the Royal Armada which set sail for Punta de Araya in 1603, under the command of don Luis Fajardo, and I found work as ship's boy on the galleon of my uncle, Captain Esteban Eguíño, a first cousin to my mother, who now lives in San Sebastian.

I went on board, and we set sail from Sanlúcar on Holy Monday in the year 1603.



Editor's note: Catalina de Erauso was employed as a cabin boy on the voyage to the New World. Upon arrival in modern day Colombia, she stole 500 pesos from the captain and ran away ashore. She eventually made her way down to Lima, Peru where Catalina found work with a prominent merchant. That is, until the merchant caught Catalina "frolicking" with his daughter in their front parlour. "I had my head in the folds of her skirt and she was combing my hair while I ran my hand up and down be-

tween her legs," was how she put it. Catalina was fired and decided to join an army battalion headed for Chile, a violent frontier where the Spaniards were fighting a prolonged war with the Araucanian Indians.



Chapter Six

She arrives in Concepción in Chile and there encounters her brother. She moves on to Paicabí, where she takes part in the battle of Valdivia, rescuing the company colors. She returns to Concepción, kills two men and her own brother.

After twenty days at sea, we came to the port of Concepción, a decent-sized town that goes by the nickname *the noble and the loyal*, and has its own bishop. Troops were scarce in Chile at the time, and our arrival was welcome, and we received immediate orders to disembark. They came from the governor, Alonso de Ribera, conveyed by his secretary, Captain Miguel de Erauso. As soon as I heard the name I was overjoyed, and I knew it was my brother, because while I didn't know him—indeed, had never laid eyes on him because he left San Sebastian when I was only two—I had had news of him even if I didn't know his exact whereabouts. He took the rollbook and went walking up and down the line, asking each of us our names and where we were from, and when he came to me and heard my name and my country, he dropped his pen, threw his arms around me, and asked for news of his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, and his beloved Catalina, the nun. I responded as best I could without giving myself away or rousing his suspicions.

And so he went on with the roll call, and when he had finished he invited me to have supper at his house and we sat down to eat. He told me that the garrison we were assigned to at Paicabí was a soldier's worst nightmare, and that he would talk to the governor to see if he couldn't get me a new post. And at one point during the meal, he went up to see the governor, taking me with him, reported to him the arrival of the new recruits, and begged him as a favor to reassign to his company a certain young greenhorn from his own province, saying he hadn't seen any of his own countrymen since leaving home. The governor had me brought in, and when he saw me—I cannot say why—he

said there was nothing he could do. My brother was crushed and left the room, but then a little while later the governor called him back and told him it should be as he requested.

So that, when the companies marched out, I stayed behind as my brother's soldier, and dined at his table for three years, all the while never letting on to my secret. On occasion, I went with him to the house of the mistress he kept in town, and on other occasions I went there without him. It wasn't long before he found out, and imagining the worst he told me that he'd better not catch me at it again. But he spied on me, and when he caught me there the next time he waited outside, and when I came out he lit into me with his belt, wounding me in the hand.

I was forced to defend myself, and the sound of our brawling brought the Captain Francisco de Aillón, and he made peace between us. Still, for fear of the governor, who was a stickler for rules, I had to take refuge in the church of San Francisco, and there I remained, even though my brother interceded on my behalf, until the day he came to tell me I had been banished to Paicabí. There was nothing to be done, I was forced to leave for Paicabí, where I remained for three years.

So there I was, in Paicabí, for three years of misery, and after having always led the good life. What with the swarms of Indians in those parts, we ate, drank and slept in our armor, until finally the governor, Alonso de Sarabia, arrived with the rest of the armies of Chile. We joined up with them and were quartered in the plains of Valdivia, on open ground, five thousand men, with everything but discomfort in short supply. The Indians sacked Valdivia and took the field. Three or four times before, we had marched out to meet them and engaged them on the field, always gaining the upper hand and butchering them—but in the last battle reinforcements arrived and it went badly for us, and they killed many of our men, captains, my own lieutenant, and rode off with the company flag.

When I saw the flag being carried off, I rode after it with two horsemen at my side, through the midst of a great multitude of Indians, trampling and slashing away and taking some wounds in re-

turn. Before long, one of the three of us fell dead, and the two that remained pressed on until we overtook the flag. But then my other companion went down, spitted on a lance. I had taken a bad blow to the leg, but I killed the chief who was carrying the flag, pulled it from his body and spurred my horse on, trampling and killing and slaughtering more men than there are numbers—but badly wounded, with three arrows in me and a gash from a lance in my left shoulder which had me in great pain—until at last I reached our own lines and fell from my horse. A few men came to my side, among them my brother, whom I hadn't seen in a while, and this was a great comfort to me. My wounds were tended to, and we stayed quartered there for nine months. At the end of that time, my brother brought me the flag I had rescued, a present from the governor, and I became the lieutenant of Alonso Moreno's company, which soon came under the command of Captain Gonzalo Rodríguez—the first captain I had ever served under—and all in all, I prospered and was well taken care of.

I served as a lieutenant for five years. I was there at the battle of Puren where my captain fell, leaving me in command of the company for some six months, and during that time I had a number of encounters with the enemy and took a few arrows. In one battle, I came up against one of the Indian captains, Francisco Quispiguaucha, a newly made Christian and a rich one too, whose devilish raids gave us plenty of trouble. I met him on the field, threw him from his horse, and he surrendered to me. I immediately strung him up from the nearest tree, and this made the governor furious, for as it turned out he had wanted the man taken alive, and they say it was for this reason he didn't give me the company, but gave it to Captain Casadevante instead, and put me on half-pay with some promising noises about next time.

The armies withdrew, each company back to its own garrison, and I went on to Nacimiento, which despite its fine name is nothing more than a shortcut to the grave—and there again I all but ate, drank and slept in my armor. But I'd only been there a few days when fieldmaster Alvaro Núñez de Pineda arrived with orders from the governor to form a detachment for the Valley of Puren, some eight hundred cavalry from our garrison and

others, and I was numbered among them, along with other officers and captains. We headed out for the Valley of Puren, and were on the rampage there for six months or so, slashing and burning Indian croplands. Later, the Governor Alonso de Ribera gave me permission to go back to Concepción, and I returned to my post in the company of Francisco Navarette, and there I remained.

But Chance toyed with me, turning my every scrap of luck into disaster. I had been leading a quiet life in Concepción until, one day, when I was in the guard camp, I went into a nearby gambling house with a fellow lieutenant. We began to play, and the game was going along smoothly, when a small misunderstanding came up and my companion, with plenty of people around to hear it, told me I lied like a cuckold. I drew out my dagger and ran it into his chest. So many people jumped on me—those at the table, and those that came running at the sound of the brawl—that I couldn't budge. One of the attachés held me fast until the local judge, Francisco de Párraga, came in, and he grabbed me tight as well, and shook me this way and that, firing I don't know what questions at me. I told him that I would make my statement before the governor.

At this point, my brother came in and told me, in Basque, to run for my life. The judge grabbed me by my jacket collar and, dagger in hand, I told him to turn me loose—but the man shook me again, and I let him have it, slicing him across both cheeks—and still he held fast, so that I gave him another one, and he let go. I drew my sword as the whole room charged at me, backed toward the door, levelling whatever got in my way, and made my escape into a nearby Franciscan church, where I learned that both the lieutenant and the judge were dead.

This brought out the governor, Alonso García Remón, who had the church surrounded with soldiers and kept it that way for six months. He issued a proclamation, offering a reward to the man who took me alive, and forbidding my embarkation at any port. He alerted the various garrisons and marketplaces—and took other precautions as well—until time, which cures all things, also cured his vigilance. Petitions on my behalf began to pile up, the guards surrounding the church

were removed, the general air of alarm seemed to lift, and as I began to feel more at ease and even receive visits from friends, people began to talk about how provoked I had been in the first place, and what a tight spot I had been in.

One of the friends who came to see me during this time was Don Juan de Silva, a full lieutenant, who told me he'd had some words with a certain don Francisco de Rojas, a knight of Santiago, and that he had challenged him to a duel for eleven that night. Each man was to bring a second, he said, and he had no one to turn to but myself.

I didn't answer at first, thinking it was some sort of trap. Juan de Silva guessed what was on my mind, and said, "If you're not with me, so be it, I will go alone. There is no other man I trust at my side." I said to myself, "What can you be thinking?" and accepted.

As the bells were ringing out for evening prayer, I left the church and went to his house. We dined and chatted about one thing or another until ten o'clock, when we heard the bells strike the hour and gathered up our swords and cloaks and set out for the spot. The darkness was so thick, you couldn't see your hand in front of your face—and noting this, I suggested we should tie our handkerchiefs around our arms so that, whatever might happen in the next couple of hours, we would not mistake one another.

The two men arrived, and one of them said, "Don Juan de Silva?" and I could tell by the voice it was don Francisco de Rojas.

Don Juan answered "Here I am!" and they each laid hand to sword and went at each other, while the other man and I stood by.

They went on duelling, and after a while I could tell my friend had taken a hit, and that he wasn't any the better for it. I jumped to his side, and the other man took the side of don Francisco, we parried two on two, and before long don Francisco and don Juan fell to the ground. My opponent and I kept fighting, and my point went home below his left nipple, as I later learned, through what felt like a double thickness of leather, and he fell to the ground.

"Ah, traitor," he said, "you have killed me!" I thought I recognized this stranger's voice.

"Who are you?" I asked, and he answered, "Captain Miguel de Erauso."

I was stunned. My brother begged for a priest, as did the other two, and I went running to the Franciscan church and dispatched two friars to take their confessions. The other two died on the spot—and my brother was carried to the house of the governor, whom he had served as secretary of war. A doctor and a surgeon were summoned to tend to his wounds, and they did what they could. Then a statement was taken, and they asked him the name of his murderer, and when my brother begged for a mouthful of wine, the doctor, whose name was Robledo, said no, it would not be advisable, and he begged again, and again the doctor refused, and my brother said, "Why, Sir, you are crueller to me than Lieutenant Diaz was!"—and after a few minutes, he passed away.

At this point, the governor had the church surrounded and tried to force his way in with his personal guard. The friars resisted, along with their superior, a certain brother Francisco de Otaño, who today lives in Lima, and a hot argument ensued, until a couple of the brothers plucked up their courage and told the governor to think it over carefully, because if he came in he could forget about leaving, and with that the governor cooled down and withdrew, leaving some guards behind.

Captain Miguel de Erauso was dead, they buried him in the Franciscan monastery, and I watched from the choir—God knows in what misery! I stayed there for eight months while they prosecuted me on a charge of rebellion—a charge I was given no opportunity to defend myself against.

When don Juan Ponce de León offered me his protection, I saw my chance. He gave me a horse and weapons and wished me godspeed out of Concepción, on to Valdivia and Tucumán.

The Double World: One Man's Search for Meaning in the Seattle Public Library

Bess Lovejoy

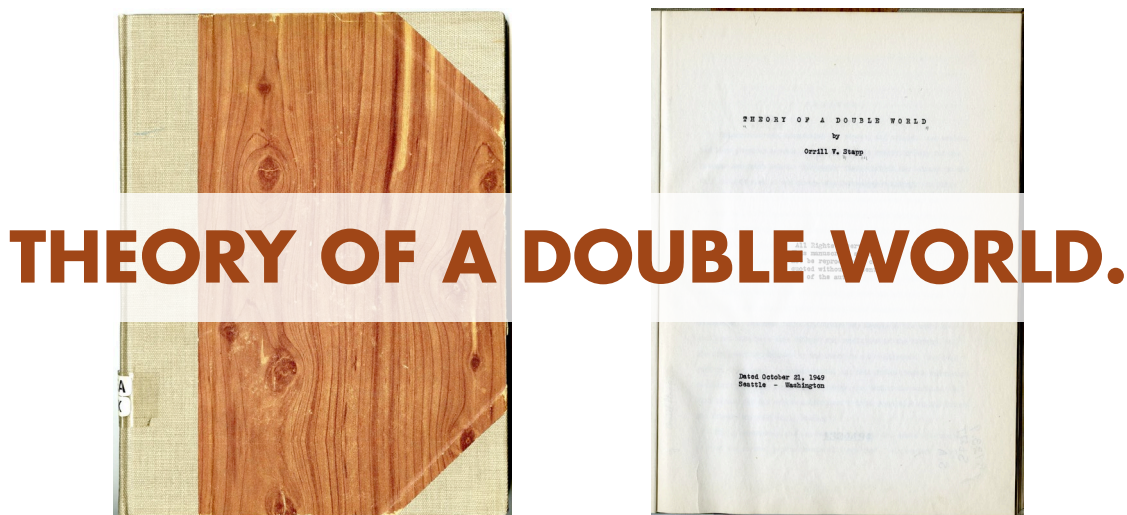
I knew Orrill Stapp before I met him.

The thin man with the wire-rimmed glasses, battered briefcase, and scuffed shoes. The black woman with the long tweed coat, red lipstick, and bulging shoulder bags. The elderly man who looked like John Bolton, only with a droopier mustache. The woman with plastic bags waddled up around her feet, the surgical mask strapped to her face. I'd seen them all during my time at the Seattle Public Library, scribbling in notebooks, sitting in the same seats day after day, waiting for the elevator with me. I knew them and they knew me, but we never acknowledged each other.

Orrill Stapp was one of them, although he died before I was born, and he wrote, every day, in an earlier incarnation of the same library. The day I discovered his manuscript, my own months of

writing were over. I had just had a photograph taken at a friend's studio, and was killing time between downtown appointments by exploring the library's Seattle Room. "Room" is perhaps overly generous: the space has no immediate ceiling and no real walls, just panes of glass and steps that lead to an enclosure housing the older, stranger books, many devoted to local history. City directories line one set of shelves, alongside a pile of fragments from deteriorating covers and spines, as if the volumes are shedding their skins like snakes.

Perhaps since it was around Halloween, I walked over to the section with the books about ghosts. Wedged in among the newer works, most with lurid covers and poorly thought-out font choices, was a volume I'd never seen before. It was thin, bound in canvas and fake wood, with black letters on the spine announcing the title in all caps:



I flipped it open. It was immediately apparent the book had never been published. For one thing, it began with a typewritten letter addressed to the head librarian:

Dear Mr. Young, Here are the two copies of the manuscript 'Theory of a Double World' of which I told you on the 17th. The Foreword explains why I wish to have them in the library before publication, which may be long delayed.

The author went on to express his desire to have the original copy of the book placed into the library's Reference section, a place he was quite fond of. "It was just eighteen years ago today, in this same room," he wrote, "that certain patterns in events coming together first made me aware of the true significance of phenomena I had been watching in the many preceding months, the significance being verified over and over in the subsequent years."*

Toward the end of the letter, the author said he was "curious about a point in cataloging," since the work bridged the fields of religion, philosophy, and science.

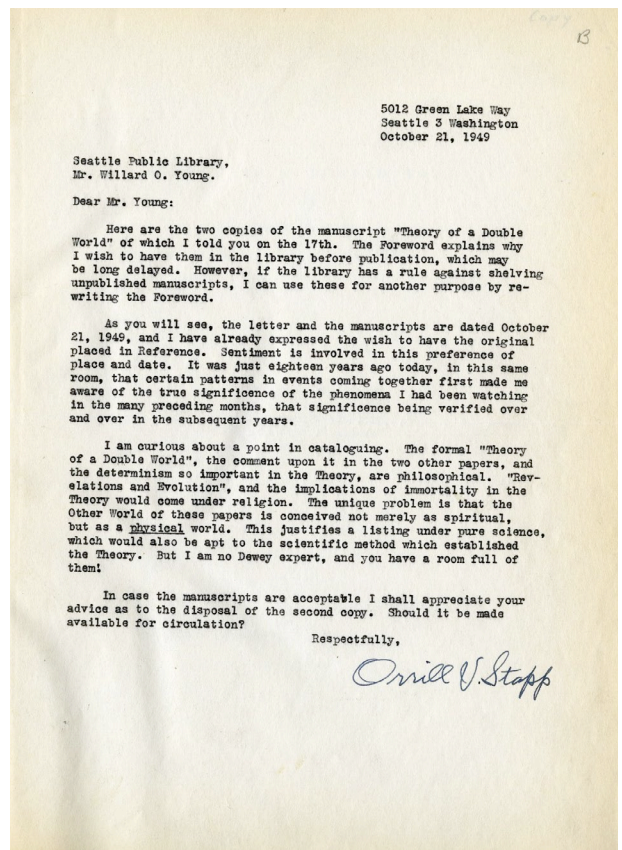
The unique problem is that the Other World of these papers is conceived not merely as spiritual, but as a physical world. This justified a listing under pure science, which would also be apt to the scientific method which established the Theory. But I am no Dewey expert, and you have a room full of them!

I pictured the library's 1940s staff of "Dewey experts" as a crowd of men in crew cuts and bow ties, and tried not to laugh in the middle of the hushed enclosure. Who was this man who wrote books about "other worlds," and then pondered their call numbers?

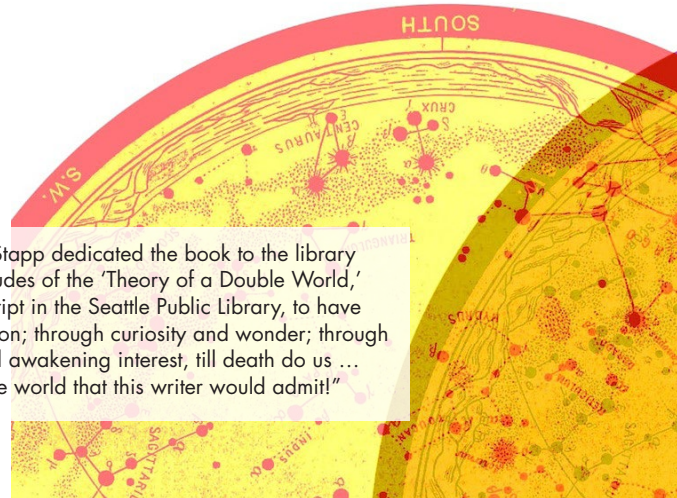
The letter was dated October 21, 1949 and signed, in midnight blue ink, Orrill V. Stapp.



*In the opening pages of the "Theory of a Double World," Stapp dedicated the book to the library in lines that read like marriage vows. "Whatever the vicissitudes of the 'Theory of a Double World,' before any other library, he wishes to place the first manuscript in the Seattle Public Library, to have and to hold from this day forth; through silence and inattention; through curiosity and wonder; through derision and controversy; through fearsome approaches and awakening interest, till death do us ... But why speak of death? Death should be the last thing in the world that this writer would admit!"



As it turned out, Stapp was intimately familiar with the Seattle library. At the time he wrote the letter, he was in the midst of an almost forty-year period of reading and writing at the downtown branch, five days a week. Most of that time was spent at the massive, Carnegie-funded sandstone building that opened on Fourth Avenue in 1906, later to be torn down and replaced by a boxy modernist structure in 1960. The librarians at each spot probably knew Stapp by sight, as some of them today know the woman with red lipstick, the John Bolton doppelgänger, and me.



When I really got to work on the psychic problem I soon saw that the first question should be, not, Does the soul survive death? But, Is there a place, another world, where the soul might survive?

I doubt if there could have been in physical science any score of years more fertile towards the fruition of my new hypothesis than the second and third decades of this century. It is true that during this time the world was very much with us 'late and soon, buying and selling ...' Who does not remember October of 1929? But also during this time it was not only the world of the Odyssey that was always escaping. During this time, as all physicists know, our own supposedly very material world was fading away. Classical physics became ever more tenuous.

That very dense substance, gold, not only faded away on the exchanges of 1929; it faded away so that one physicist could speak of it as pretty much a mere cloud of particles. ... [a]s our seemingly very material world forever receded, I reflected a good deal on the notion that where our world grew thinnest another world might begin to take on substance. Heretofore the orthodox had talked vaguely of a heaven that was somewhere else, and the more sophisticated talked of life on other planets. A philosophical inertia held me closer at home. When the physicists taught me that so much space was going to waste in our world, I saw no need of traveling vast distances. I saw the possibility of another world right here where our world is!

It was also during the 1930s that Stapp's family began to suspect he was having a nervous breakdown. Although still involved with the family business, he became more interested in reading esoteric journals than writing editorials for *The Outlook*. And while immersed in this research, Stapp was impressed by several things:

I have spent hours, days, months, years, studying the printed records of psychic research. I solved a thousand and one things here and there; but I was ever more strongly impressed by certain puzzling characters in what I studied. One of these characters I may best indicate by the three words 'ever not quite.' Time after time as one scans the endless scripts and the interminable comments, a strong feeling is engendered as if one should say: Now, surely, comes the denouement, the illumination toward which all seems to have tended. But it does not come. Always the episodes, the phenomena, the text, stops just short of convincing evidence.

Stapp was also struck by what he called all the "piffing." "No word could be better!" he wrote. "The purported talk from the Other World was too often puerile, trivial, and seemingly utter nonsense. I recall a paper by William James on purported communication with Richard Hodg-

son, the 'Zeivorn' matter. The eminent psychologist and philosopher was bewildered. He wrote that it seemed only so much 'bosh.' So also was I constantly impressed with this seeming triviality, with words misspelled or used wrongly, with many other puzzling things."²

But instead of deciding that the "ever-not-quite," the piffing, and the bosh were evidence against psychic phenomena, Stapp found them meaningful. "Very often I had the feeling that what I read had a style as if someone, 'something' behind the scenes were trying to do two things at once, reveal something, and at the same time conceal it," he wrote.

At some point after 1930, Stapp's life became suffused with meaning. Everyday occurrences—from the time displayed on his watch when he woke up, to the news on the radio, the books at the library, the movies at the theatre—convinced him that events dismissed by others as "coincidences" were in fact part of deep patterns hinting at the existence of a Double World that slowly, surely, shyly, wanted to reveal itself.

He found meaning in the length of car rides, in the numbers on license plates. Stan remembered that

his father always wanted to know what time it was when they set off in the car, almost down to the split-second. (Orrill himself never drove.) “Clocks and time!—how long that story would be!” Orrill wrote, explaining that as a child, his brother had died on a December 2nd at 3:55 am, and afterward, for several years, he always awoke at that time. “The Other World can know the time by my watch in my pocket or under my pillow in the darkness of night,” he concluded.

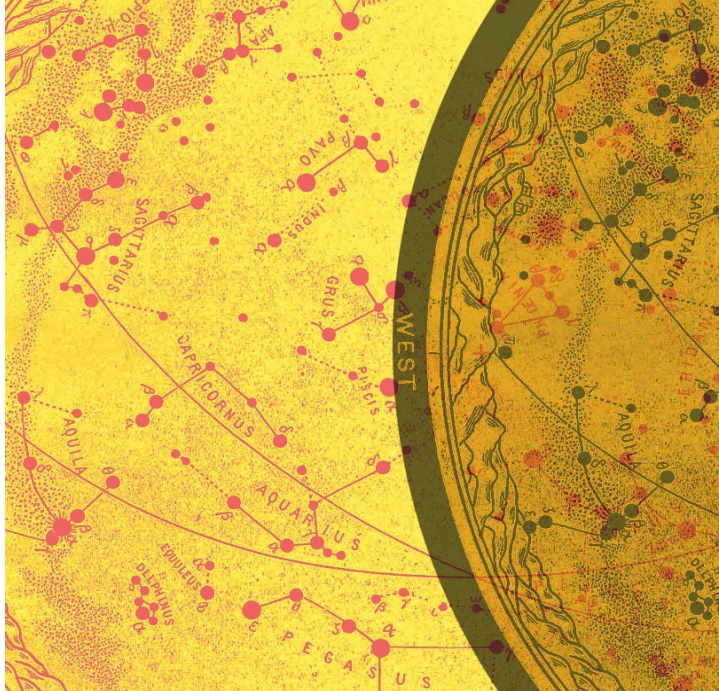
Time was not the only thing fraught with meaning; Stapp also found the spectral hands of the Other World guiding his interactions with books:

I work regularly in large libraries. Many thousands of books are shelved all around me. I want something in a book. I cross the large room, get the volume, and return. At my table I make a motion to open the book. Flop! It opens precisely at the page wanted, no effort to find the place, no fumbling.

But that wasn’t all, Stapp wrote: often the very book he needed was waiting for him at his table when he returned from lunch, or he’d go to the dictionary in search of a word only to find it lying open in precisely the right place.

Time after time, writing at the library, have I thrown my pen down and gotten up to walk the floor, to move about the department, too full of wonder and awe to attempt expression of my feelings. ... I walk the floor in amazement. I see the This World things, whatever that means, so solidly about me. I see the This World persons, whatever that means, so real and alive about me. Over and over I exclaim to myself: Where is that Other World so evidently here?

Stapp admitted that he could never figure out where the Other World existed, and in fact, when he tried to focus on it, it receded further and further away, like the end of a rainbow.



In 1946, Stapp was institutionalized at Northern State Hospital in Sedro Woolley, Washington state. Unlike other regional insane asylums, later known for their ice baths and electroshock therapy, Northern State focused on occupational therapy, with patients tending crops and milking cows. Stapp was released after almost eight months; as Stan tells it, his father didn’t really belong there, among “guys pushing blocks around on the floor.”

Estranged from his wife, Stapp returned to the family home, but slept on the downstairs couch. He spent the later part of his life in rented rooms, taking the bus to the library. Even as the family’s newspaper flourished, Stapp increasingly spent his time on his theories, eventually compiling what he said was “ten million words” of evidence in support of his Double World. According to Stan, his father was legally declared incompetent.*

“But the peculiar thing is,” Stan said, “if that you talked to him and he didn’t get on that subject he would be very normal, very learned.”

* Northern State Hospital closed in 1973, and today many of the buildings are abandoned. The picturesque ruins are a favored site for reports of hauntings, and for paranormal investigators.

Orrill Stapp died in 1968 at the age of ninety. He left behind his papers, copies of a journal he'd published called *The Triton*, books of his poems, and very little else. In an *Outlook* column written a few days after his death, Stan calculated that his father had spent five days a week, 52 weeks a year in the library for at least 38 years—about 9,880 days.

“He knew he would die when he could no longer make it down to the library,” Stan wrote. “His diary reveals the struggle it was in the last few weeks of his life, but he kept going anyway. ‘This must be my last day at the library,’ he wrote last Friday. ‘No, it isn’t,’ he argued with himself.”

These days, I often write on the floor below where Stapp's manuscript is kept. After repeated readings, I still don't understand it. Is it the ramblings of an ill man? A fossilized remnant of a time when the study of other-worldly phenomena was a more accepted strategy for understanding our universe? Part of a larger stash of documents, perhaps stowed in some attic, that might prove Stapp's life was as unusual as he experienced it? Or all three, and something else besides—an attempt to find significance in the mundane and overlooked, to re-enchant a disenchanted world. For now, I just think of Stapp as another presence in the library with me, in *This World*; in suit jacket and spectacles, head bowed over his books, alive with his own pursuit of meaning.³

I'd like to thank Janet Ore for her invaluable assistance with this project.



Notes

1. In the Fall of 1991, Janet Ore interviewed Stan Stapp as part of the research for her book *The Seattle Bungalow: People and Houses, 1900–1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007). Now a professor of history at Colorado State University, Ore was kind enough to share these tapes with me.

2. In 1906, a medium named Leonora Piper mentioned the term ‘Zeivorn,’ which she said was a password, during a session with William James. At the time Piper was purporting to channel Society for Psychical Research member Richard Hodgson, who had died the previous year. In 1919, the novelist Hubert Wales proposed that ‘Zeivorn’ was in fact code for ‘Minerva,’ the name of one of Piper's daughters.

3. And for what it's worth, *Theory of a Double World* received the call number R133.9 St27T. The librarian at the Seattle Room informed me that 133.9 referred to “Specific topics in parapsychology and occultism: Spiritualism.”

Stapp strongly denied being a Spiritualist.



The Phantom Punch

Tina Post



n all the chaos that surrounded the rematch between Muhammad Ali and Sonny Liston, a few things remained quite clear: it was certain that Sonny Liston had fallen. The actor Stepin Fetchit was definitely in Ali's corner. Some kind of punch was thrown, and, invisible or not, something powerful had happened.

Nothing in boxing has accrued quite so much lore as the so-called phantom punch that felled Sonny Liston—unless he felled himself—in the Ali-Liston rematch in May of 1965. It is, as slow motion shows, a short right hand to the face—an eight-inch chop, really—that follows an ineffectual left lead from Liston. By the time Ali has thrown his next, a left hook, Liston is already down.

It seemed as though no one in attendance actually saw the punch, which sent Liston to the canvas not once, but two times—he began to rise, then fell back down, then rose again to resume the fight. Meanwhile, Nat Fleisher, editor in chief of the magazine *The Ring*, began screaming that Liston was out. Ali had never gone to a neutral corner, the referee had never started an official count, and the timekeeper had never banged the canvas or otherwise motioned the count. Yet when the referee finally understood that the knockdown timekeeper had gotten to a count of twelve, he stopped the fight, which had already recommenced, and declared Ali winner.

In the next day's AP wire story, Liston is quoted as saying, "It was a sneak punch—a right hand I only 'partly' saw. I didn't want to jump right up. The referee never started the count. I didn't know when to get up." He is described as "unruffled." Given the bizarre circumstances, there was immediately—and in reprise of their first fight in February of 1964, when Liston quit on his stool—talk of a fix. The fact that the knockout blow was virtually unseen didn't help.

Ali, a brilliant self-promoter, immediately began to capitalize on its invisibility. The actor and performer Stepin Fetchit was a member of Ali's entourage, and as early as October of 1964, Ali had claimed to the press that he was learning secret techniques—including something called an "anchor punch"—from Fetchit, who had, in turn, learned them from his friendship with Jack Johnson, America's first black heavyweight champ. In advance of the fight, no one seemed to take this seriously, and the "anchor punch" was never really explained.

And then Liston fell.



In the summer of 1927, the buzz in Hollywood was the impending release of Warner Brothers' new talkie *The Jazz Singer*. Sound was a new frontier in motion pictures, and *The Jazz Singer* represented an early salvo in the battle for the nation's imagination. All the other major studios were scrambling.

At the MGM studios, producer John M. Stahl held

auditions for a talkie called *In Old Kentucky*. He was sizing up Negro actors for a character called High-pockets, a shiftless layabout.

Among the aspirants at Stahl's casting call, one man stood out—a bramble in the sharp polish of that Hollywood lot. He was loveably dimwitted, country through and through. His eyes were sad, heavy-lidded. The wide-open part of his face was the brow—ever arched in wonderment and generosity, it rendered him extraordinarily vulnerable. He mumbled and scratched his head, checked his pockets, hands roving aimlessly but harmlessly from empty space to empty space, never an answer to be found. He seemed always to be precariously balanced, even on flat ground. His spine, easy as a willow, might be at the mercy of any passing breeze.

Clearly much of this world was beyond his comprehension. Come to that, too much of this world was beyond his comprehension, so much so that quickly the studio executives began to suspect there was more to this character than met the eye, and that in ways they both did and did not understand, he was pulling one over. They began to laugh, and could swear that the harder they laughed the dumber he got. They asked his name, and he told them it was Stepin Fetchit. They told him he'd got the part.

Before the 1920s, black Americans were rarely seen on film, their appearance largely confined to short "anthropological" recordings. In feature length movies, white actors in blackface played black characters. In the South, patrons were assured before the screening of movies that black characters were not actually portrayed by Negroes. Only a handful of black actors found studio work before the advent of sound. But with America's rising interest in "authentic" Negro culture, especially the sounds of jazz—and with the revolution of talkies, which allowed studios to capitalize on that interest—Hollywood began to reassess the suitability—and profitability—of the Negro to play himself.

It was a revolutionary moment, one whose effects would reverberate for another forty years. Ironically, America's obsession with the "authentic" Negro allowed black Americans the opportunity

to play an acknowledged part, and American culture would begin reckoning with the long-sublimated fear that the heretofore simple, childlike Negro might appear as something other than what he was, the possibility that he might be capable of wearing a face not his own, of showing an emotion he did not feel. It suggested no doffed cap could be trusted. It suggested fingers crossed behind every respectful bow. Any smile might turn sinister, might flash some sudden glint of gold.



After the Civil War and the failed experiment that was Reconstruction, lynchings became commonplace in the American South, even matters of public spectacle. Lynchings are often understood to have been clandestine, midnight attacks of revenge—and often they were. Yet other lynchings were advertised in newspapers and attended, on occasion, by thousands. They were horrific and varied, involving, among other things, hanging, dragging, castration and amputation, burning, and whipping. White women and children participated in the killing as well as white men. At times, photographs of the witnessing crowds were taken—victims displayed like hunting trophies—and made into postcards to be shared.

To black people of the day, it seemed clear that the purpose of lynchings—the reason they became, and remained, a phenomenon—was not so much to punish the offenders, but to ensure that the black populace as a whole knew its place. In large measure, it worked.

“The things that influenced my conduct as a Negro did not have to happen to me directly,” wrote Richard Wright in *Black Boy*. “I needed but to hear of them to feel their full effects in the deepest layers of my consciousness. Indeed, the white brutality that I had not seen was a more effective control of my behavior than that which I knew.” Literature and remembrances from that period suggest that scarcely a black person in the South did not know of a lynching or near-lynching within their family or community.

Within such a system, black Americans—especially black men—became practiced in moderating and controlling every facet of their physical

selves. Life was a constant performance, one’s place in the world acted out according to one’s race. If such studied selfhood could trace itself back to chattel slavery—as surely it could—the crisis of it perhaps became more apparent after emancipation, when one had, or was supposed to have had, a choice in the matter. For this was not simply a matter of letter or contract, the body pitted against the blinded strictures of law. Rather it was the eye of another, its overreach of gaze, controlling one’s body with the help of the kindly overseer of one’s own self—pacing one’s muscles, scripting one’s path, bending one’s neck.

Many black Americans left the South, hoping they or their children might avoid becoming “strange fruit.” The part they learned to play stayed with them, however. They’d studied it so well.



In 1934, in his new, northern home of Detroit, a black child of the South decided to turn professional in the boxing ring.

According to legend—circulated in mainstream biographies as early as 1945—before Joe Louis’s managers took him on as a pro, they presented him with a set of rules to live by. These rules, frequently recounted as a list, stated:

1. He was never to have his picture taken alongside a white woman.
2. He was never to go into a nightclub alone.
3. There would be no soft fights.
4. There would be no fixed fights.
5. He was never to gloat over a fallen opponent.
6. He was to keep a “dead pan” in front of the camera.
7. He was to live and fight clean.

Louis himself claimed John Roxborough and Julian Black presented nothing so codified. “They did not set down in writing any particular rules and say, ‘Now this is what you have to do,’” he said. “No, just in day by day talking I knew what they wanted. They never told me not to go out with white women”—in fact Louis did go out with white women—“they said don’t ever get your picture taken with one—that would be the end of my career.”

“One time they were talking about these little black toy dolls they used to make of fighters,” he continued. “Those dolls always had the wide grin with thick red lips. They looked foolish. I got the message—don’t look like a fool nigger doll. Look like a black man with dignity.”



“It is a peculiar sensation,” wrote W.E.B. Du Bois, “this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”

Measurement, though, is only one half of a constant process of calibration. The other half, of course, is adjustment.



When, around 1985, I learn my mother intends to lead my Brownie troop for a year, I am filled with dread. The premonition will not be disappointed.

Troop meetings happen in our living room, where her eyes see everything. I am on my best behavior, but I am never quite diligent enough. I have to do everything better than the circle of girls who are already white, who have silky feathered hair and blond mothers with perms. When the last of the girls has gone home, my mother turns her focus on me. My tote bag stitches are crooked. My sash is limply decorated. I must do better than this. It is clear from her chidings that she feels we are being observed, and that we have an impossible, intangible something to prove. I feel I have no ally, only judges—my mother the sharpest and cruelest of all. I know I will never succeed in proving whatever it is I must prove, and it is exhausting.

Finally, spring comes, and we have one final Brownie activity before we become Girl Scouts, before the leadership is—thank God—handed off to someone else. This ceremony is in the cafeteria of our rural Junior/Senior High School, round tables pushed back to allow room for a small tier of risers on the cafeteria floor.

When our troop stands to perform some songs, my mother is all ashine; she is singing and sway-

ing her success. The more exuberant she becomes, the more I sink. My mother sees this sinking and she dances her way over. She places her arms around me, pulls me to her, and swings me beside her.

I am ashamed of this display because I feel it is a lie, one meant to benefit everyone in the room but me. I am turning red. I feel the anger rising in my stomach, feel the top of my throat close, feel the familiar stinging in the corners of my eyes. I break out of my mother’s arms and I sit down in the audience.

My mother finishes the song.

When we get in the car, she begins screaming about her embarrassment. She screams all the way home, and then she screams in the living room. I begin to taste the possibility that my mother actually felt genuine affection in that moment—that the consummate performance of our goodness had left us vulnerable to an attack of love. I fended it off. I’ve won the round, but lost the fight. I feel like I have eaten a thunderstorm.

“Jim Crow Wisdom,” Richard Wright called his mother’s harsh instruction, lessons meant to equip him to negotiate the world as a member of his race. I have no name for my moments of such instruction, my mother having come from the Caribbean. But the lessons of race were nevertheless clear: *Your inadequacy will make you angry. Your small stands will make you proud. In either case, show nothing.*



“All the people I could see, and many more than that, were moving toward me, against me, and... everyone was white,” James Baldwin wrote to describe his experience of an injustice. “I remember how their faces gleamed. And I felt, like a physical sensation, a click at the nape of my neck as though some interior string connecting my head to my body had been cut.” Yes, exactly, I thought—that was just how it felt.

I knew, just so, that mechanical click at the neck, the unlatching that releases the head, which floats, in the fullness of its own weight, as though remaining in place only through magic or mag-netics.

In this state, Baldwin, baiting his own rage, entered a restaurant where he knew he would not be served. “I do not know how long I waited,” he wrote, “and I rather wonder, until today, what I could possibly have looked like.”

I do not know to what extent black Americans at large experience this question today. I only know that I was raised to understand that the conditions of my selfhood were profoundly problematic—in a way that felt intimately tied to race—and that my first job, under any and all circumstances, was mitigation. I was to maximize my whiteness and perfection, ideals that I did not understand to be divorced in any way. Controlling affect—not merely behavior, but the selfhood behind it, anticipating its reception and adjusting accordingly—this was the one tool always at my disposal.

I am, in other words, a trained actor.

It is a difficult training to let go. Try cooking with no regard to flavor. Try singing with no regard to key.

I have long since abandoned the notion that I should try to be white or perfect. But I know of no way to stop looking at myself through the eyes of others. I know of no way to unlearn how to calibrate.



Joe Louis was one of the first historical figures by whom I was profoundly moved. In his deadpan expression I saw myself. At the time he was fighting, millions of others did, too—even those who, like Richard Wright, recognized that boxers are animated by forces beyond themselves. This recognition is evident in his description of Joe Louis and rival Max Schmeling as puppets. “But out beyond the walls of the stadium,” he wrote, “were twelve million Negroes to whom the black puppet symbolized the living refutation of the hatred spewed forth daily over radios, in newspapers, in movies,

and in books about their lives. Day by day since their alleged emancipation, they have watched a picture of themselves being painted as lazy, stupid, and diseased. In helpless horror they have suffered the attacks and exploitation which followed in the wake of their being branded as ‘inferiors.’ [...] Jim Crowed in the army and navy, barred from many trades and professions, excluded from commerce and finance, relegated to menial positions in government, segregated residentially, denied the right of franchise for the most part; in short, forced to live a separate and impoverished life, they were glad for even the meager acceptance of their humanity implied in the championship of Joe Louis.”

Yet even at that moment, a tremendous shift was taking place in American culture. Beginning with the First World War and lasting even until the reign of Ali, millions of black Americans streamed out of the South and into America’s northern and western urban centers. In these new places, for a generation raised in a new time, a different sort of performance suddenly became, not only possible, but reflective of the experiences of many.

But it was still a performance.



Take, for example, Ali’s weigh-in during his first fight with then-champion Sonny Liston in 1964, during the last days in which the world knew him as Cassius Clay.

While weigh-ins had heretofore been fairly reasonable affairs, Clay and his corner man Bundini Brown arrived shouting “Fly like a butterfly, sting like a bee; rumble, young man, rumble.” Clay wore a jean jacket inscribed with the words “Bear Huntin’”—“big ugly bear,” he’d decided, was the most effectual torture of Sonny Liston, who was large and silent and scarred.

Clay continued the ruckus after Brown quieted down, banging an African walking stick while continuing to shout things such as “I’m the champ,” and “This is my destiny,” and “Round eight to prove I’m great. Bring that big ugly bear on.”

Warned by members of the Miami Beach Boxing Commission of a possible fine, Angelo Dundee and Sugar Ray Robinson—the other two members of Clay’s entourage—implored him in the dressing room to behave. For two minutes after leaving the dressing room, it seemed possible he might comply. Instead, when Sonny Liston appeared, Cassius Clay went nuts.

At the fight, ringside in seat 7, sat Malcolm X in his white shirt and suit and tie, looking, to the measurement of many, like a black man with dignity would look.

Mort Sharnick of *Sports Illustrated*—credited with being an exceptionally observant reporter—later described the scene in this way: “I was there, and it looked to me like Cassius was having a seizure, all gathered up in his own hysteria, going on and on, totally out of control. It was hard to believe he could fight that night. Sugar Ray Robinson was trying to calm him down. There had to be six guys holding on to him, and it looked like he was struggling to throw all six around. Then, right in the middle of everything—and I don’t know how many people saw this—he winked at Robinson. People were screaming and shoving and jockeying for better camera angles, and Cassius was probably having a ball.”

In the midst of this, the Boxing Commission made two moves. Morris Klein, chairman of the Miami Commission, stepped to the microphone and announced a fine of \$2,500. Dr. Alexander Robbins, the commission doctor, tried several times to fulfill his duty of taking Clay’s blood pressure and pulse. He finally found that his pulse—normally 54 beats per minute—had soared to 120, and that his blood pressure was 200 over 100.

Back at Ali’s house, a mere hour after all the commotion, Ferdie Pacheco repeated the blood pressure check. “It was the most amazing thing,” Pacheco said. An hour after the commotion, I took his blood pressure and the pulse was at 54, normal for him, and his blood pressure was 120 over 80, perfect. It was all an act.”

“It was an absolutely extraordinary performance,” said Robert Lipsyte of the *New York Times*, “because Liston took comfort in the fact that everybody was scared of him. I mean, who wouldn’t be terrified of Sonny Liston? Well, the answer, of course, was that a crazy person wouldn’t be afraid, and now Liston thought Clay was crazy.”

Liston, in other words, was now afraid. Increasingly, so was the rest of the nation. At the fight, ringside in seat 7, sat Malcolm X in his white shirt and suit and tie, looking, to the measurement of many, like a black man with dignity would look.



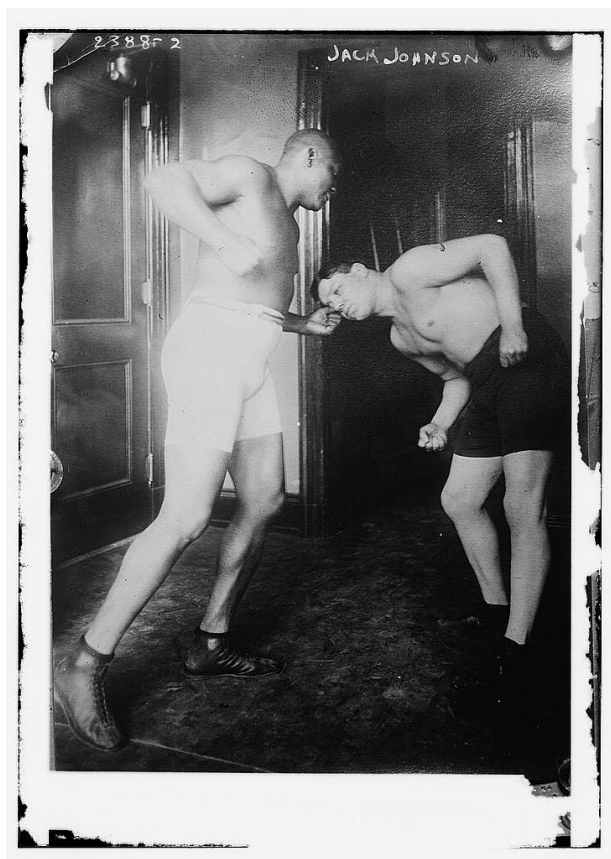
Sonny Liston, on the other hand, was already ensconced in the American imagination as anything other than dignified. It seemed not to matter at all what he himself said or did: no matter what gracious statements he made, what acts of generosity he extended, no matter how many sick beds or orphanages he visited, he would not be redeemed. This is not to suggest he was helpless, or that he didn’t at times undermine himself. He did. It is clear, however, that only one kind of performance was accepted from him, that there was only one role in which he’d be cast.

Liston’s reputation stemmed from several sources. First, and importantly, was his criminal record, which began in St. Louis when Liston was in his early twenties. Liston was the sort of man for whom, after a childhood of brutal privations and abuse, prison was a relief, in that it offered three meals a day. Liston’s boxing career began in prison, under the tutelage of a priest. Despite his obvious promise, however, upon his release only the mob was willing to put up the money to manage him, thus beginning an association that would haunt Liston throughout his career. Liston reputedly worked as an enforcer when he was not in the ring. In 1960, testimony before the U.S. Senate

Antitrust and Monopoly subcommittee made clear that Liston was controlled by mobsters Frankie Carbo and Frank “Blinky” Palermo. Liston participated in the much-publicized proceedings, securing his association with the underworld. And as an illiterate man, he was at a profound disadvantage—with the police, with his bosses, before Congress, and in the press.

Liston was deeply distrustful of most—though not all—reporters, which contributed to his reputation as a sullen, surly champion. Even when, in December of 1963, he posed on the cover of *Esquire* in a Santa Claus hat and—to the modern eye—a fairly relaxed and inscrutable expression, it read to the American public as glowering hostility.

Significantly, the man who convinced Liston to pose for *Esquire* was Joe Louis. Despite the fact that Louis had been America’s darling and Liston was anything but, the two became fast friends. When Liston died, Louis was one of his pallbearers—they were that close. And while that friendship is often either not discussed or discussed as an unfortunate symbol of Louis’s decline, I find that far too simple. While their biographies varied wildly, and while their cultural performances were interpreted differently, Liston was, in fact, an inheritor of Louis. Aside from any similarities in fighting style—and experts do cite some—in Liston and Louis, America had two very intelligent and inexpressive men, both of whom cared deeply for their reception and their meaning to their people, both of whom relied heavily on the good graces of others in their making, and both of whom found themselves profoundly abandoned when their use became less apparent. Liston had always idolized Louis, and it’s no small wonder. Yet it seems clear to me that in Liston, Louis found far more than an ardent admirer—he’d never been short on those. Rather, he found something of an understudy. But the audience was walking out.



“Jack Johnson,” Bain News Publisher, Ca. 1910-1915
Library of Congress

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“Essentially every black champion until Muhammad Ali has been a puppet, manipulated by whites in his private life to control his public image,” wrote Eldridge Cleaver in *Soul on Ice*. “His role was to conceal the strings from which he was suspended, so as to appear autonomous and self-motivated before the public. But with the coming of Muhammad Ali, the puppet-master was left with a handful of strings to which his dancing doll was no longer attached.”

Whether this description was true of Louis and those black champions who followed him, it was probably not true of Jack Johnson, the sole black heavyweight champion prior to Louis, whose brazen indifference to his expected behavior as a black man upset a nation of whites—and, in consequence—a good

many middle class blacks. His reign defined all that Louis was constructed in opposition to.

A certain current narrative of Jack Johnson casts him simply as a highly individualist man, unwilling to work within the framework of race he inherited. "I have found no better way of avoiding race prejudice than to act with people of other races as if prejudice did not exist," Johnson is famously quoted as saying.

But I don't buy it. Johnson only embroiled himself with white women at a time when others like him lost their lives for even looking. He brought his bass violin to a bandstand and sang, "I Love My Wife," lest anyone forget. He would wrap his penis in gauze to enhance his size, then stroll around the boxing ring to the pleasure and horror of onlookers. Whether done to earnestly impress or in cheeky defiance of perverted obsession, given the concurrent "scientific" analysis of racial difference, this was not a race-neutral act. Johnson dressed himself to the pinnacle of the life of the sport, "enough diamonds to illuminate his shirt front and hands to make him a conspicuous figure when he promenades the streets." With Zip Coon dancing upon the minstrel stage in his finery, this manner of dress was not devoid of racialized meaning. He explicitly threatened violence with a smile. If a raceless society was Johnson's object, it was not his methodology.

Whatever utterances he made about wanting to be viewed only as a man, his comportment is of one who, far from moving in ignorance of race, was intentionally provoking others over it. He was perfectly well aware of the social mores that surrounded him, and he pitched his performance in defiance of them.



By 1965, Johnson had been gone for nearly twenty years, having died in a car crash when he raced away from a diner that refused him service. Fetchit had long since fallen out of favor, especially with black audiences who decried him as an Uncle Tom. Using any podium he could get, Fetchit pointed, to no avail, to the limited roles available to black actors in his day, to the fact that he'd never tolerated disrespect from the studios, to the fact that

he was one of the first black millionaires, to the fact that he was the first black to get headline billing. He insisted he was only playing a character, and that, just as nobody assumed the pantomime characters of whites represented whites, nobody should assume that about blacks.

He was also, by the mid-sixties, broke. Following the usual script, at the height of his success in the 1920s and 1930s Fetchit had lived lavishly, giving money away, buying cars, dressing impeccably, and maintaining a small army of Chinese servants. It was during this time that he and Johnson became friends. Two flamboyant figures in the small world of black celebrity, both were favorites of Los Angeles's Central Avenue. Fetchit relished the attention, and people absolutely noticed recklessly extravagant spending—which was, to be fair, part and parcel of being "Hollywood." In 1947, Fetchit filed for bankruptcy. His timing was exceptionally poor, as, from the 1950s to the 1970s, Hollywood roles for black actors all but dried up, leaving Fetchit working a circuit of small theatre reviews.

Destitute, Fetchit was in 1964 admitted to a charity hospital, suffering from a prostate condition that required surgery. After being released, he found his way to Ali's entourage. He was ensconced there by October that year, when Ali told a reporter that Fetchit was teaching him Johnson punches.

Between the first and second Ali–Liston fights, the tensions of race within the country—and within the black community—had grown more and more strained. Malcolm X's rift with the Nation of Islam (NOI), which had begun even before the 1964 Miami fight, now broke open. Though Malcolm had been Ali's mentor and sponsor in the Nation of Islam, Ali knew, and chose, the safer side. On Valentine's Day in 1965, Malcolm's house in Queens was firebombed. On February 21, he was killed by a hit squad in Harlem.

Right away, Nation of Islam members were understood to have been involved. Tensions smoldered between the Nation and the members of Malcolm's new organization, the Muslim Mosque, Inc. Two days after the assassination, Malcolm's former NOI Mosque in Harlem burned. A war seemed imminent.

And while the boxing world was by this time used to a measure of darkness and disarray, the whole country now seemed in chaos, and it came home to the fight camps in new and extreme ways.

Weeks before the fight, the Massachusetts boxing authorities reversed their decision to stage it. Lewiston, Maine, took the fight instead, but tensions continued. There were persistent rumors that Malcolm loyalists planned to avenge his death by assassinating Ali, perhaps even in the ring. Nation of Islam brothers flooded Lewiston. Another persistent rumor claimed the NOI had threatened Liston or his family if he didn't take a dive.

In this atmosphere, Fetchit probably provided much-needed relief. Fetchit was given the absurd title of "Strategic Advisor," and Ali and his camp strove to capitalize on the Jack Johnson connection. When Ali won the fight with a phantom punch, the story suddenly acquired an unexpected plausibility.

"Fuck knows," Robert Lipsyte is quoted as saying when asked whether Fetchit really taught Ali a trick of Johnson's. "It's certainly not impossible."



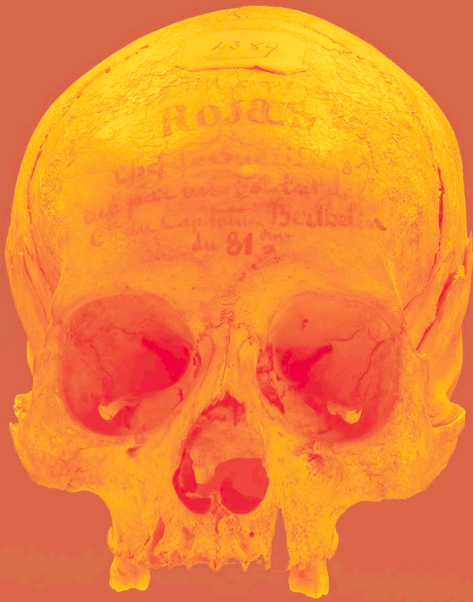
It is no simple irony that the man whose very name would become code, in the American lexicon, for stooping Tommerly, became part of the entourage and legacy of a man who represented unapologetic blackness instead—just as it is no simple irony that Liston and Louis were friends. Audience and inheritance are complicated, our performances tenuous. For some, the puppet strings will never come untangled. The veil is always so close. We can only partly see.

For what it's worth I do believe that a "phantom punch" existed, and that it was passed from Johnson to Fetchit to Ali. And though it certainly involved quickness and instinct and control and strength and an accurate measurement of one's target, I do not believe, in any literal sense, that it was a punch at all.



Ali's cornerman Bundini Brown was raised in Goose Hollow, Florida, the black settlement outside of Sanford. There, in his youth, when Joe Louis fought elsewhere, "amplifiers were strung up in the pines out by one of the cabins and the folks sat around in the darkness to listen and cheer," as journalist George Plimpton relayed. On one occasion, Plimpton wrote, a storm came up, "whipping the pine forest during one of the broadcasts, so that the words from Madison Square Garden, or wherever, were shredded away, people running around in the wild darkness trying to find out what was going on as if the words whirling off were corporeal, retrievable, like panicky chickens."

How beautiful and bizarre, to imagine the colored folk of Goose Hollow chasing through a pine forest in the warm, windy dark, running after the ghosts of words spoken into a microphone lit garishly more than nine hundred miles away. And while Louis goes to work, expressionless, amidst the cheering, here is the hushed softness of pine needles underfoot, the sounds of winds and breath meeting the scraps of the announcer's assessment of Joe's great performance in the ring. Each punch is whisked off into the night like smoke. The people grasp after some small bit of each powerful shade. They run among the jabs and uppercuts unscathed.



The Fourth Skull: A Tale of Authenticity and Fraud

Jane MacLaren Walsh and David Hunt

This is a story of four different skulls that reached three of the world's largest museums under less than transparent circumstances—a fact that was mildly ironic given that three of these skulls were carved from rock crystal, and only the fourth is an actual human cranium. Perhaps more notable is that all of them have been thought, at various times, to be that bane of museum collections: frauds.

The three quartz skulls, popularly known as crystal skulls, were all sold in the nineteenth century as ancient Aztec carvings by the French antiquarian Eugène Boban (1834–1908). Two found their way to the Trocadero in Paris in 1878 after they had been exhibited at the Exposition Universelle. The third skull was sold to Tiffany's in New York City in 1886, and purchased by the British Museum in 1898.

The story's fourth skull was apparently that of a notorious Mexican bandit named Rojas, who fought off French invaders, and was shot in the back in 1865. On this diminutive skull's forehead is a legend, identifying it as “Mexique—Rojas—Chef de Guerillas—tué par un soldat cie. du capitain Berthelin du 81e.” There are also several catalogue numbers inscribed upon it but, strangely, there is also a Venus symbol, signifying that the skull was also thought at one point to have been female. Perhaps it wasn't Rojas at all. The Army Medical Museum purchased it in 1887 from the very same Eugène Boban, and transferred it to the Smithsonian Institution's physical anthropology collections in 1904.

The quartz skulls eventually raised the eyebrows of anthropologists for two reasons. First, rock crystal is exceedingly rare in pre-Columbian collections, and no crystal skull has ever been excavated in a controlled archaeological dig. And second, because of the man who sold them all: the amateur archaeologist, collector and dealer Eugène Boban, who lived in Mexico from 1853 until 1869. The story of how he sold his crystal skulls to important national museums—and what those skulls actually were—is one that has taken over a century to unfold. The unraveling of the mystery is well known and has been extensively written about by one of the authors, Jane Walsh. The after-effect of that story, however, was a need to understand the nature and authenticity of other artifacts Boban sold to the world's museums, which number in the thousands. The bandit's cranium, studied and evaluated in 2012, initially also appeared suspect. Its story, however, turned out to be even more dramatic, amplifying a moment in the history of imperialism and resistance in the Americas.

This is a tale of four skulls, but it is also the story of authenticity and fakery in the imagined ruins of the Mexican past, conjuring images of pre-Columbian sacrificial victims, bloody bandits and betrayal—a history of illusions unlocked by twenty-first century science.



Eugène André Boban Duvergé ca. 1867.
Museo de Historia, Mexico City.

I. Digging for Treasure.

When he arrived in Mexico City in 1857, fresh from the California gold fields, Eugène Boban was still hoping to strike it rich. He'd left Paris as an unemployed nineteen-year-old just ahead of Napoleon III's draft, and though he hadn't struck gold, he acquired two things that proved more valuable in the long run: a second language, Spanish, and an appreciation of the native peoples of the Americas. As it happened, Mexico was the perfect place to put these talents to use, and he was able to invent a new career and a new life.

Then as now, remnants of Mexico's history remained close to the surface. Everywhere he walked, Boban found objects linked to the country's ancient past. He befriended Indians living in and near Mexico City, who showed him likely places to dig and taught him a third language, Nahuatl. The country was a treasure house where the artifacts of past civilizations were his for the taking—or so he believed. He soon made a comfortable living selling artifacts to tourists and foreign dignitaries, and his earnings allowed him to purchase, for a relative pittance, thousands of pages of early colonial documents and numerous first editions on Mexican history, languages and culture. The books and manuscripts he amassed were his university education, and he eagerly devoured their contents.¹

Boban's arrival in Mexico coincided with the War of Reform (1857-1861). That civil war culminated in the election of President Benito Juárez, a Zapotec Indian who hoped to reverse the country's racial, class, and economic inequalities. Juárez particularly sought to diminish the wealth and power of the Mexican Catholic church, which had allied itself with the conservatives who opposed his rise to power. As a budding entrepreneur, Boban would profit from this confrontation in a number of ways.

The Spanish conquerors had destroyed or overlaid the temples and 'idols' of the indigenous people, and now in 1861, Juárez laid siege to the Christian temples that had been built atop the Aztec structures. The great sixteenth-century church and monastery of San Francisco, just two blocks from Boban's business, was entirely dismantled; its art, library and gilded choir were removed to make room for a cavalry stable. And that was just the beginning. More than forty religious structures were razed during Juárez's presidency. To raise money to pay the debts incurred during the War of Reform, the Juárez government sold off much of the contents of the demolished buildings, often for a fraction of their worth. "The sale of Church property was a comedy played out between shrewd dealers and money launderers, a dramatic case of fraud, the state giving huge advantages to the purchasers," writes one historian. W.H. Bullock, a British businessman, noted that there was a fairly limited market for religious artifacts because



Boban's Paris Shop.
Hispanic Society of America, New York.

conservative Mexicans feared excommunication if they purchased any of the art. However, there were foreigners who "were willing to pocket their scruples and invest in it ... many Frenchmen and Belgians, and some English, realized considerable fortunes."

Judging from photographs of his shop, Boban was among those who took advantage of the situation, and by the late 1860s he had acquired a large collection of religious art and Spanish colonial artifacts in addition to his archaeological artifacts. Religious paintings lined the walls behind the shelves, which in turn hold figures of saints and the Virgin, and ornate crucifixes. There are also textiles, cups and chalices and numerous other valuable items.

By the end of Juárez's first year in office Spain, Great Britain, and France invaded Mexico to exact payment of loans they had made to the reform government. England and Spain soon departed, but France, then governed by Napoleon III, remained. After an initial Mexican victory at the

Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862—now commemorated as Cinco de Mayo—the French General Bazaine defeated the Mexican forces. President Juarez fled Mexico City with his cabinet on the last day of May 1863.

The Mexican church and its allies had encouraged the French intervention, and now “sought to broaden their scope into a full-fledged invasion that would replace Juárez with a foreign ruler, who would support their conservative program.” The French government, in consultation with the conservatives, installed Maximilian of Austria as Emperor of Mexico. A member of the Habsburg family, Maximilian was related to the Spanish royalty that had ruled Mexico for almost three hundred years.

At the time of the French intervention Eugène Boban had already spent eight years in the country. With his cache of pre-Columbian artifacts and historical knowledge, he was perfectly disposed to act as an expert on Mexico’s prehistoric past, and in 1865 the French duly named him an archaeological consultant to Napoleon III’s Commission Scientifique. Boban began advertising himself as “antiquarian to the Emperor,” and a notice for his Curiosities and Antiquities shop appeared in a business directory of the newly formed Mexican Empire. Among the items listed for sale were stuffed birds, ceramics, paintings, weapons, Chinese porcelains, and Aztec antiquities.

The Commission Scientifique eventually sent a selection of Boban’s pre-Columbian artifacts to Paris for exhibition at the Exposition Universelle in 1867 to illustrate the achievements of the Empire. Boban hoped to use the exhibition as an advertisement for the collection’s sale to the Louvre. Unfortunately, in the midst of the Exposition news came from Mexico that Maximilian had been executed and that Benito Juarez had re-assumed his office as president. Maximilian’s death cast a pall over all things Mexican, dashing Boban’s

hopes for selling his collection in France. At the close of the Exposition, the collection was given to Boban’s family for safekeeping; his mother encouraged Boban to come home and make provisions for its sale.

After a sixteen-year absence including twelve years in Mexico, Boban sailed from Veracruz to Paris in March of 1869. His friend Dr. Francisco Fenelon wished him *bon voyage*, and encouraged the successful sale of his collection, writing, “Flood France with your curiosities, and squeeze all the ugly metal out of them that you can in exchange ...”



2. Aztecs in Paris

A few months after his return, Boban opened a shop called Antiquites Mexicaines. It was situated around the corner from the Sorbonne and across the street from the Musée de Cluny, a medieval monastery that had opened as a public museum in the 1840s. This carefully chosen location promised access to scientists and historians and he soon established himself as an authority on pre-Columbian artifacts and other antiquities despite his lack of formal education.



Boban's Paris Shop
Hispanic Society of America, New York

Boban's shop glittered as much for its contents as its owner's knowledge. Boban's original pre-Columbian collection contained several thousand artifacts, including numerous large stone Aztec and Toltec icons and fine pottery from the central valley of Mexico, rare ceramic figurines from Veracruz, and distinctive stone masks from Teotihuacan. It was the largest and most important collection in Europe at the time. A porphyry carving of Quetzalcoatl depicted as a man enveloped in a feathered serpent is of exceptional quality and interest. It included more than a hundred Remojadas figurines from Veracruz—their smiling heads never before seen by scholars and students. The stone masks from Teotihuacan are exemplary and highly instructive; Boban himself appears to have excavated them. A jadeite mask depicting the face of a flayed victim, acquired from the Museo Nacional, is a beautifully executed and chillingly powerful portrait.

The thirty-five-year-old antiquarian may have believed that he would sell his collection quickly and return to Mexico a rich man. He had left a wife there, who was looked after by his friend Dr. Fenelon. She is mentioned in a letter written by Col. Dutrelaine, head of the French Scientific Commission in Mexico, who described Boban as “a little married” to a woman from Chiapas. We don't know if she was a native Maya speaker or a Mestiza; we don't even know her name. We do know that she was the first of three women Boban may or may not have married.

Unfortunately, Boban had arrived in Paris at the worst possible time for such a venture. It was just before the Prussian army laid siege to the city, a disaster that was soon followed by the Commune Revolt. It would take six years before his first major sale was concluded, in 1875, when Alphonse Pinart, a well-connected linguist, ethnographer, and explorer, purchased most of Boban's pre-Columbian collection. Pinart then made a deal with the French government to give this newly purchased collection to the Trocadero, in exchange for government funding for his planned expeditions to America and the Pacific. Although Pinart benefited quickly from the purchase and donation of Boban's collection, Boban would not actually receive payment for the sale until the end of 1879. Sadly, his Mexican wife had died in 1873; his orig-



Crystal skull, Musée du quai Branly, Paris.
Jane Walsh

inal plan of returning to see her was defeated on all counts.

When the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadero in Paris opened to the public in 1882, Boban's Mexican pre-Columbian material (bought and donated by Alphonse Pinart) was the museum's premier New World archaeological collection. Despite the disasters of the invasion of Mexico, the French remained fascinated with pre-Columbian cultures, particularly the exotic depictions of gods and goddesses with their elaborate and lugubrious iconography. Boban played on that romance, and became an advisor to Ernest T. Hamy, the director of the Trocadero, on matters relating to his collection.

Boban also became known as a source for skulls. French anthropologists were particularly fascinated with craniometry, the scientific study and measurement of human skulls, and many scientific societies had their own collections. In addition to his pre-Columbian artifacts, Boban had also collected human skeletal remains from his Mexican digs, which he eventually sold and donated to a variety of museums in Europe. Boban corresponded with Paul Broca, the physician, anatomist, anthropologist, and founder of the Laboratoire d'anthropologie; Boban took courses from him, frequented his lectures, and sold him a variety of artifacts, in addition to donating skulls to his laboratory.

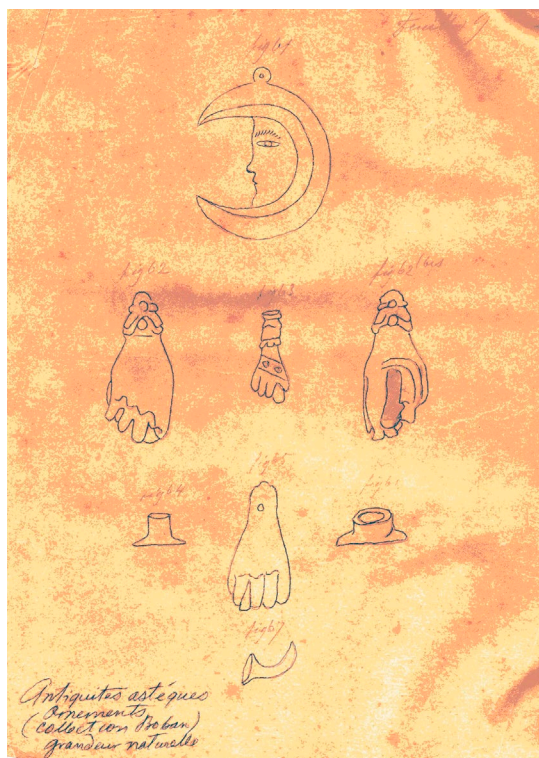
Today, however, Boban is known for a different sort of skullduggery: despite the fact that he collected thousands of important and authentic ar-

tifacts from countless sites in Mexico, his most famous objects—his crystal skulls—are fakes. At the time, however, they were greeted as astoundingly, importantly real. During Boban's lifetime the director of the Trocadero's ethnographic museum, Hamy, published two separate articles on Boban's flashiest fakes: two crystal skulls and an obsidian plaque with the date 1347. In his publication marking the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America, Hamy described the large crystal skull as possibly a pendant from the mantle of one of the Aztec gods.

Hamy was fooled, but he was hardly alone. Verifying the authenticity of rock crystal artifacts was problematic from the start. Because Europeans found crystal objects so appealing, they were predisposed to believing in their importance and authenticity in a pre-Columbian context. This was despite the fact that quartz was quite rare in Mesoamerican archaeological collections. Aside from the small crystal goblet from Monte Alban's Tomb 7, documented rock crystal objects in Mexico are confined to beads and labrets.

But was Boban himself taken in? Did he know that he was selling fakes? Or was he part of the trick? Although Boban published on a number of important and authentic pieces that he had collected over the years, he studiously avoided his problematic pieces, and drawings of his material that he sent to Europe suggest that he had some difficulty in deciding which crystal objects were actually pre-Columbian. A few of the crystal objects were shaped like human skulls, but others were carved fists, and another was a crescent-shaped object, an image of the man in the moon. The fists, or *mano fico*, and the man in the moon are European concepts; Aztecs imagined rabbits on the moon and the fist amulets were not part of their iconography at all. As such, these objects were clearly misidentified. Boban would deal in crystal objects throughout his career, benefiting from the allure of the material, but their very mystery cast a shadow on his reputation as a dealer and scholar.*

* The publications may have been advertisements for the sale of the artifacts, but the objects highlighted were nonetheless authentic and accurately described.



Drawings from Boban's *Antiquités Mexicaine*
Hispanic Society of America, New York

The two crystal skulls sold by Boban to Pinart, one the size of a grapefruit and the other the size of

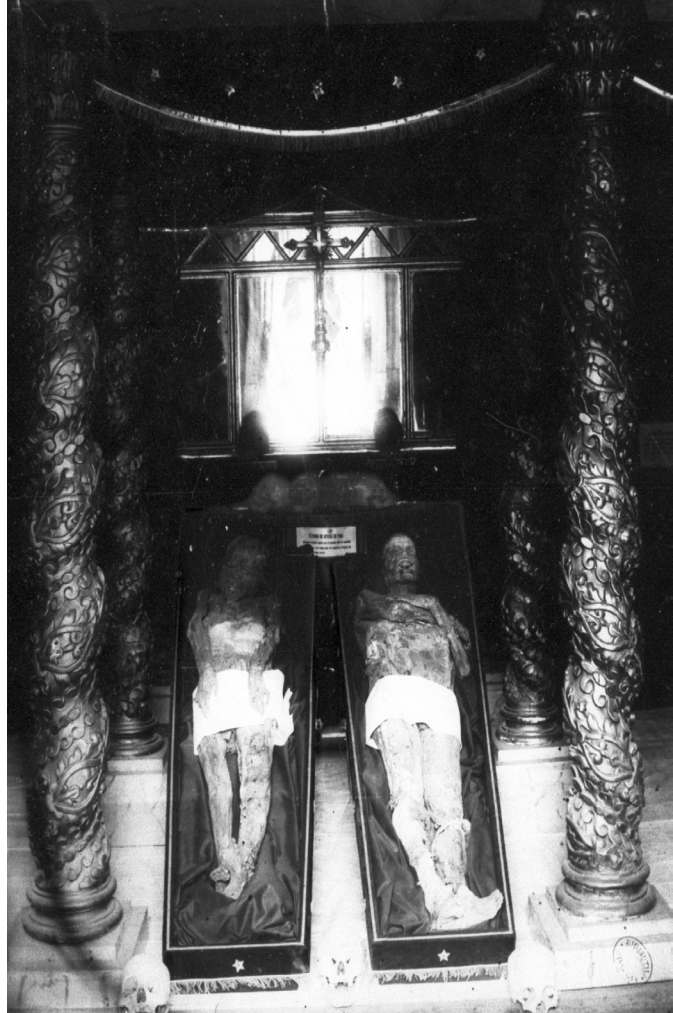
a grape, were exhibited in 1878 at the Exposition Universelle, and are both still in the Musée du quai Branly. The larger skull was not part of the original 1867 exhibit, and was either brought to Paris by Boban in 1869 or acquired by him there at some later date. Already these skulls were proving to be somewhat problematic for Boban's reputation. A description of the 1878 exposition notes, "One can also see a representation of a human skull in rock crystal, which comes from the Boban collection acquired by M. Pinart. But the authenticity appears doubtful."

Boban was by no means abashed. His business grew over the years, and by 1878 his catalogs advertised objects from all over the world. In 1881 he offered another, much larger human skull carved from the purest quartz crystal for the substantial sum of 3500 francs. The skull was listed in a section entitled "*objets divers*"—not as part of his archaeological material from Mexico or the Americas. Yet, despite the allure of rock crystal and skulls, this object didn't sell. Perhaps the price was too high. A few years later, however, Boban would make the skull appear not only more valuable, but also exotic and ancient.²



3. "Unique in All the World"

In February of 1885, Eugène Boban, fifty years old now, finally returned to Mexico City. With his second wife, he opened a private museum he called the Museo Científico. It contained four exhibit halls. The first contained ethnographic exhibits from North and South America, Africa and Oceania. The second held a library of more than a thousand volumes on prehistory, archaeology, geology, mineralogy, etc. The third room displayed Boban's extensive archaeological collections from Mexico, North America, Peru, Egypt, Italy and Greece, along with European paleontology. And the fourth exhibit room was dedicated to craniometry or physical anthropology. It contained four "historic mummies" from the Mexican convent of Santo Domingo, which had been found in 1861 and were described as "victims of the Inquisition." In addition, there was the mummy of a "young Egyptian prince" dating to 1643 BC, along with a series of human skulls that, according to Boban,

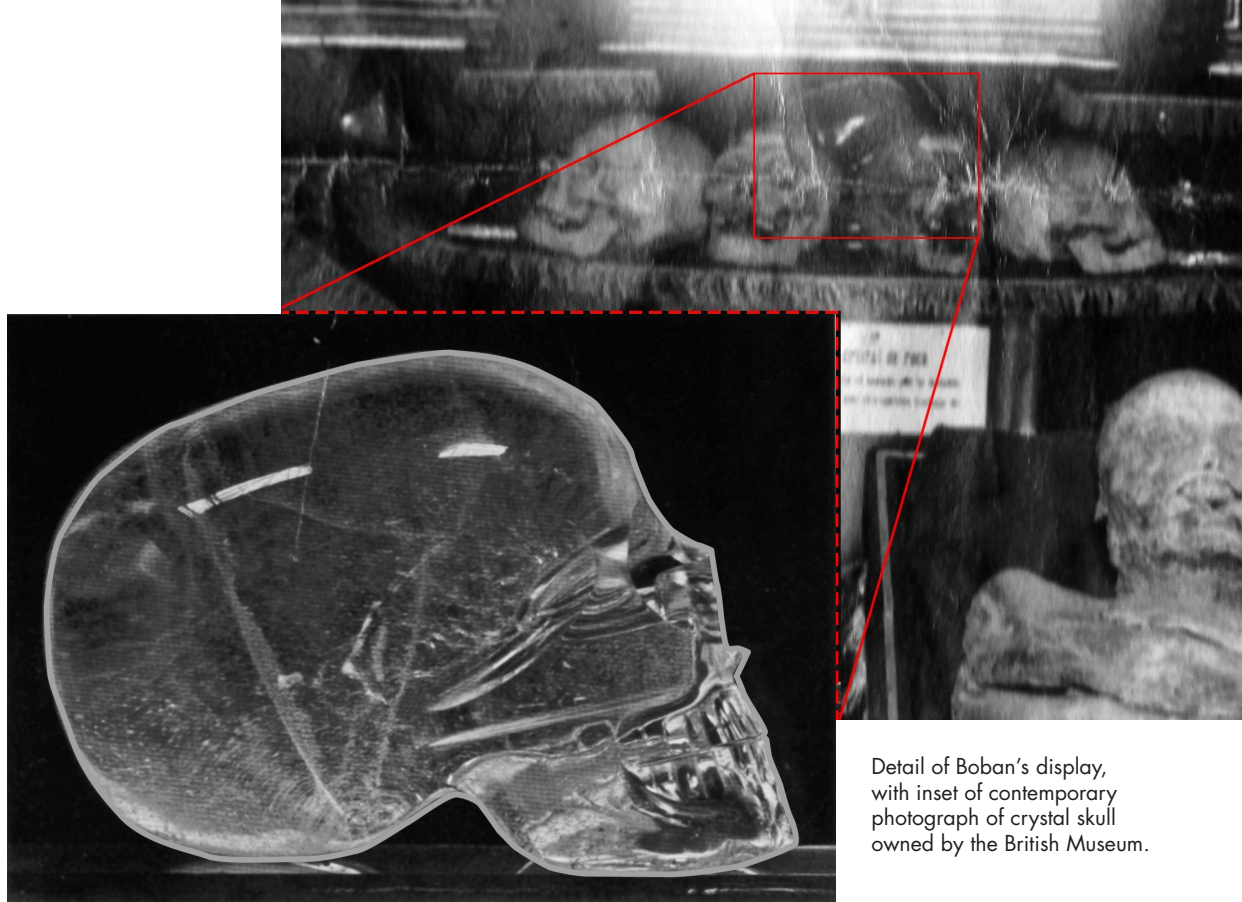


Eugène Boban Correspondence; Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.

represented the ancient populations of Mexico as well as other regions. Also featured in this section was "a life-size rock crystal skull (quartz hyaline) unique in all the world."

In the bizarre display above, two of the Santo Domingo mummies, covered with white cloths for modesty's sake, are laid out in velvet lined coffins, beneath a canopy supported by four ornately carved columns, a sort of catafalque. There is an arrangement of human skulls at the foot of the coffins. Just behind the coffins is a table containing more human skulls described as ancient people of Mexico, and a label reading "Craneo de Cristal de Roca," which can be seen in the enlargement below. The crystal skull can be made out in the center just behind the other crania. It has a shine to it, and seems to be set on a pedestal.³

That skull, however—purchased in Paris—would



Detail of Boban's display, with inset of contemporary photograph of crystal skull owned by the British Museum.

lead to Boban's abrupt departure from his adopted home. In March of 1886, William Wilberforce Blake, an American official of the Mexican Railroad, collector and sometime journalist, wrote a letter to William Henry Holmes, an archaeologist at the Smithsonian Institution, filling him in on local gossip. Holmes, who had visited Mexico in 1884, had asked Blake about archaeological work being done at Teotihuacan by Leopoldo Batres, the government's Inspector of Archaeological Monuments. Blake replied that, contrary to newspaper reports, the inspector had done nothing besides interviews, but that he'd formed a partnership with Boban. Upon his return to Mexico, Boban had begun collecting anew from a variety of archaeological sites with Batres's assistance, and, according to Blake, Batres and Boban had attempted to sell a crystal skull to the National Museum of Mexico, saying that it had been excavated in Veracruz on Mexico's Gulf Coast. Once the

apparent fraud was discovered, the collector and inspector parted company, and Boban and his museum left Mexico abruptly for New York, where he opened yet another antiquities shop.*

Six months after his arrival in New York City, in December 1886, Boban put up his entire collection and library at auction on Broadway. He kept many of his most valuable objects, rather than sell low, but Tiffany and Co. purchased the "Aztec" crystal skull for one thousand dollars, considerably higher than Boban's original asking price in France. It seems that the skull's transit through Mexico had served Boban well. A decade later, Tiffany's sold the skull to the British Museum, which provided a further stamp of authenticity by grouping it with legitimate Olmec, Mayan, and Aztec objects in their pre-Columbian collection.

*Boban had met Batres in Paris in 1881 and because of their shared interest in pre-Columbian Mexico, they had developed a collegial relationship. It seems clear as well that Boban counted on the inspector's government connections to further his renewed enterprises in Mexico.



Saints Peter of Alcántara and Teresa of Ávila,
Melchor Pérez Holguín (Bolivia ca. 1700)
Hispanic Society of America, New York

All told, Boban may have sold as many as six large and small “Aztec” rock crystal skulls that found their way into various museum collections. For almost a century and a half they amazed museum visitors, who wondered how “primitive,” ancient people could have manufactured such carvings entirely by hand, using only stone tools. Research has demonstrated that they were not primitive, however, nor were they carved with stone tools. In a series of scientific studies of the crystal skulls in museum collection, there is ample evidence that all of those examined were created with modern, rotary lapidary tools unavailable to fifteenth-century Aztecs.

Where had they come from? It may have been that Boban was inspired by the smaller crystal skulls in his collection. Usually not larger than two inches in height, they were perhaps religious objects acquired by Boban during the years of reform, when monasteries and convents were demolished. A South American religious painting of the 18th century, in the Hispanic Society’s collection, depicts a saint holding a rosary with what appears to be a small skull attached to the crucifix. In

Catholic iconography, skulls typically appear beneath the crucifix as a reference to Golgotha. The fact that all the small crystal skulls collected and sold by Boban are drilled from top to bottom would indicate that they were suspended vertically, not horizontally, like the skulls on Aztec temple racks.

The very existence of crystal skulls as a class of artifacts—one that has no known archaeological basis—is a tribute to Eugène Boban’s energies and erudition, but it also presents a cautionary tale of credulity in the romanticized skills of pre-Columbian craftsmen, turning out mystically shaped objects that just happen to be what Europeans had been making themselves.

For the researcher, however, the crystal skulls present an extra problem: although Boban sold thousands of authentic artifacts, his prominent fakes make any subsequent charge of fraudulence that much easier to believe.

Too easy, perhaps.



4. Boban and the Bandit

After the New York auction, which had netted over ten thousand dollars, Boban traveled by train to Washington, D.C., hoping to sell his remaining artifacts to the Smithsonian Institution. Unfortunately, his damaged reputation had preceded him. Blake’s letter about Batres and Boban included a clear warning to his colleague at the Smithsonian. “Boban has closed his museum and will remove to New York soon. Look out for him. He hopes to sell a great many things to the Smithsonian. He has some valuable antiquities, but his ownership of them gives them a suspicious character.”

Boban’s entrée to the Smithsonian was his old friend Thomas Wilson, an archaeologist and former consul in France. Wilson translated

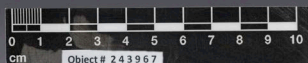
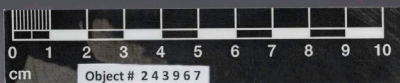
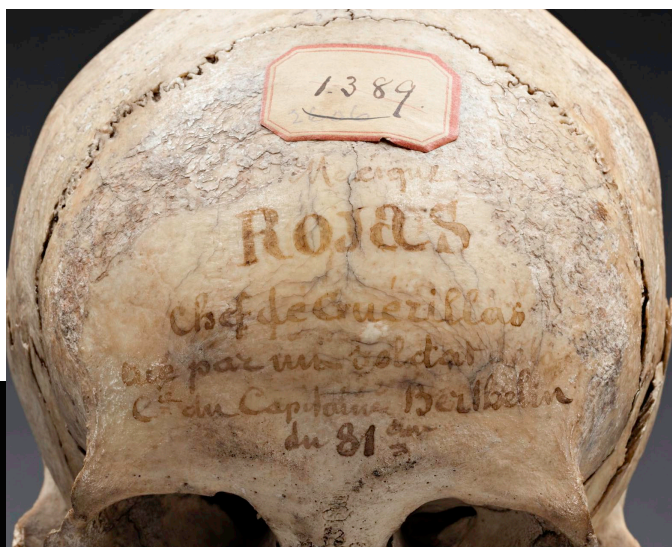
letters from Boban to William Henry Holmes offering him unsold parts of his collection. Holmes, however, had recently published an article in *Science* about fake pre-Columbian artifacts at the National Museum of Mexico, and he had a good eye. Despite Blake's warnings, Holmes was very interested in purchasing Boban's artifacts, particularly a series of Zapotec ceramics that were authentic and exceedingly rare.

The non-cultural side of the collection raised its own questions, however. Boban had offered Holmes some two-dozen human skulls, mostly Mexican, some purportedly ancient and others rather more recent, as well as a few casts of other human remains. In addition to these there were also Egyptian and "Gallo-Roman" skulls, plus one from the Congo and three from Paris. Presumably all had been part of Boban's exhibition in his Museo Cientifico in Mexico accompanying the mummies and the crystal skull.

One skull in particular troubled Holmes: number 1389 in Boban's catalogue, described as the "skull of Antonio Rojas, ferocious chief of Guerillas killed by a soldier of Capt. Berthelin's Co., French Army [during the] time of Maximilian." As it happened, Holmes had attended a popular exposition in Washington, D.C. called the Aztec Fair, produced by Benito Nichols and the Orrin brothers, Mexican circus owners. The Aztec Fair included live performers and a variety of antiquities, which photographic evidence indicate were largely nineteenth-century fakes. There were also historical sections. In one entitled "Relics of Highway Robbers in Mexico," they exhibited the "Skull of the blood-thirsty Rojas," [sic] shot by the Mexican troops in 1864 at Guadalajara."

Skull of "Rojas"

James Di Loreto, Photographer, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History



The similarity between Boban's "skull of the ferocious Guerrilla" and the Aztec Fair's "skull of the blood-thirsty Rojas" was too problematic for Holmes to overlook. Perhaps remembering Wilson Blake's warning to beware of the Frenchman, Holmes asked Boban about the problem of the two-headed bandit.

On April 3, 1887 the antiquarian replied, reassuring Holmes with his own discovery that 'ancient' skulls sold to him by the 'Chenapan' [rascal, scalawag] Leopoldo Batres, Mexico's antiquities inspector, were actually modern. Having established that he knew the difference between fakes and reality, Boban explained that Rojas's skull,

Number 1389 was given to me by a friend, Col. Tamisey, of the 60th regiment, whom I knew during the French occupation of Mexico. Since my [recent] departure from Mexico, Mr. B. Nichols [of the Aztec Fair] wanted to buy this skull from me, but found it too expensive, so asked me to sell him another. I was surprised to find the skull ... exhibited in New York at the Mexican exposition and in his catalogue with the title 'head of Rojas' etc. I do not doubt that my friend Mr. Nichols will now be happy to rectify this little error, because now he would have us believe that Rojas, this terrible brigand, had two heads, but the original is assuredly our number 1389.⁴

Holmes was unable to raise the money to buy the larger collection, but he introduced Boban to the curator of the Army Medical Museum, at the time located on the National Mall. The Army Medical Museum bought the skulls for \$99.00, and when the cranium attributed to Rojas arrived, the Museum gave it the number 2606, replacing Boban's original catalogue number of 1389. In 1904, the Museum transferred the collection to the Smithsonian, where Rojas's cranium was given catalogue number 243967, superseding both previous numbers. It has been labeled and relabeled, yet retains what seems to be Boban's own description, written just above the eye sockets:

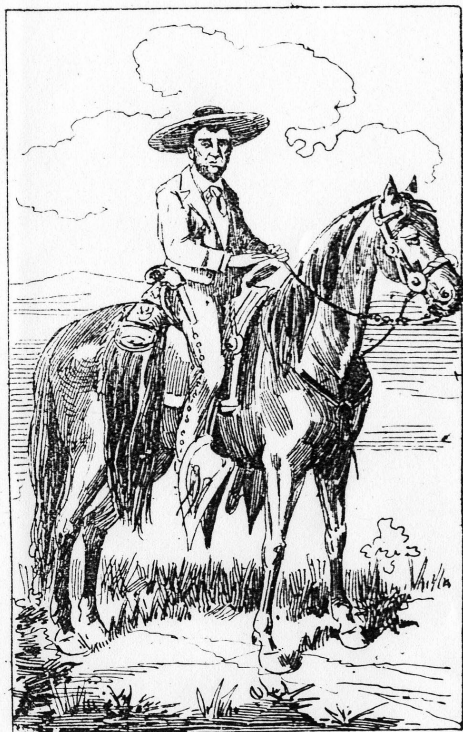
*Mexique – Rojas – Chef de Guerillas – tué par un soldat,
cie. du capitain Berthelin du 81e.*

The case was hardly closed, however. Sometime during the first half of the twentieth century, a

member of the Smithsonian's Anthropology staff examined the cranium and annotated the catalogue card with the information that the skull was that of a *female* approximately thirty to forty years of age. When discovered, this surprising notation, along with the Holmes/Boban correspondence and the Aztec Fair catalogue description—not to mention Boban's exploded "ancient Aztec" crystal skulls—cast renewed doubts on his Mexican skull dealings. Was this in fact the real Rojas skull, or was it also a fake? If it wasn't a fake, might the fierce guerilla have been small enough for someone to identify his cranium as that of a woman?

The first matter at hand was to determine the historical facts about Antonio Rojas, and if possible, whether the facts could help discern whether or not this cranium belonged to him, and how he had become a war trophy.

The bandit or guerilla fighter, Antonio Rojas was, by most accounts a bloodthirsty, illiterate warlord, who routinely shot prisoners, as many as several hundred at a time, and torched entire towns for



ANTONIO ROJAS.

General Antonio Rojas
Ireneo Paz, *Leyendas Historicas*; Antonio Rojas (1895)

no apparent reason. He rode with a secretary, don Pedro Leos, who was at least as cruel and vengeful as Rojas, and whose job it was to read Rojas documents, legal and otherwise. According to a contemporary journalist, Ireneo Paz, General Rojas signed papers and official documents with an insignia intended to strike terror in the heart of his letters' recipients: a skull, appropriately enough. Rojas and his band of men, the Galeanos, terrorized locals in the state of Jalisco in the late 1850s and early 1860s during the War of Reform. After the French invasion of 1863, however, when President Juárez called upon all Mexicans to resist the invaders, only Antonio Rojas—"of all the chiefs, who we invited to join our grand combined forces"—responded. "Unfortunately," added Ireneo Paz, the journalist. Paz fought alongside Rojas and was horrified at nearly every turn. At one point Rojas and his men were headquartered in a town called Zapotlan, when a stagecoach arrived from Guadalajara, the capital of the state. The general, who was suffering from a recent painful wound, became annoyed at the noisy coach's racket. He ordered it burned, along with the passengers, coachman, and all it contained. "Those of us present had to proceed with caution, trying to cajole this furious crazy man, to dissuade him from committing such a barbarity," Paz remembered.

First they managed to save the mail by convincing Rojas of the strategic advantages they would obtain from reading it. Then they were able to suspend the execution of the passengers, as they would be able to give news about the emplacements of the enemy. Finally they "managed to remove the death penalty from the horses, saying they could serve in the cavalry... We had to resign ourselves to watching the stagecoach in flames in the middle of the plaza. The unfortunate coachman was shot."

Rojas was extremely effective against French forces, however, and consequently became a target for a French captain not unlike himself—the counter-guerrilla fighter Alfredo Berthelin. Berthelin was, if possible, worse than Rojas. "The Frenchman was a bloodthirsty racist, a tiger in victory," writes the historian Paul Vanderwood. "He killed perhaps five hundred Mexicans in Colima and Jalisco."

The showdown between the two men was violent and bloody. On January 28, 1865, Captain Berthelin, with fifty dragoons, surprised Rojas at Potrerillos. Rojas had five hundred cavalry and three hundred infantry, but was betrayed by Diego Barrientos, a member of his own Galeanos. Barrientos had joined the Galeanos to avenge his sister, who had been raped by Rojas. Barrientos's older brother had attempted to defend their sister, when Leos, Rojas's secretary, gouged out his eyes! Diego Barrientos finally avenged his siblings by shooting Rojas in the back, while the general and his men attempted to hold off the French attack. Fifty or sixty men died in the skirmish, Rojas and Barrientos among them.

Despite Rojas's career as a bandit and terrorist, the lens of history wielded by his Mexican comrades gave him a heroic end. As Ireneo Paz wrote:

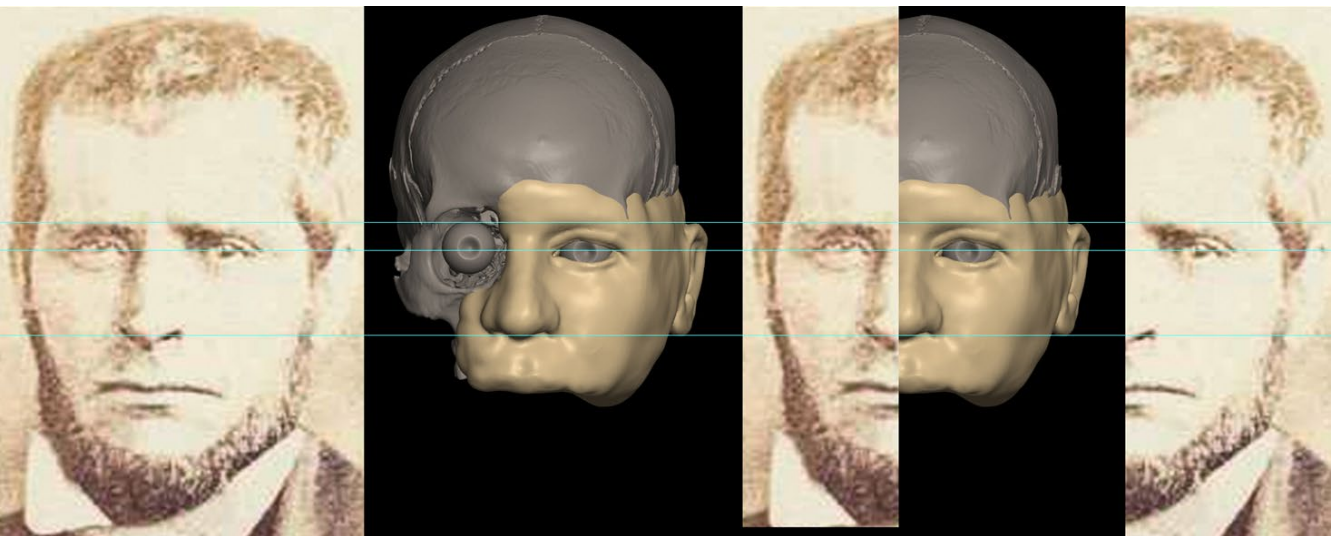
This extraordinary man who fought so hard for the republican institutions, surely without understanding them, letting more human blood than all the tyrants of the world, this man who was the terror of the towns and the families of Jalisco; this man who should have died hundreds of times on the gallows, perished gloriously firing his rifle against the invaders."



5. Rojas's Skull

So Antonio Rojas became a figure of legend—but had he become a war trophy and museum specimen?

An important piece of evidence regarding the identity and authenticity of Boban's Rojas cranium was serendipitously discovered on the Internet, when a photograph of Antonio Rojas was listed for sale. The photograph was one of ninety-four *cartes-de-visite* (calling card) images kept in a leather-bound album. Patented by French photographer André Disdéri in 1854, *Cartes de visites* were very popular in the 1850s and 1860s, when Rojas was active. The album for sale on the website was filled with images taken during the French intervention, including portraits of Benito Juárez, the many members of his cabinet, Maximilian and his court, French generals and Mexican allies, as



Photograph of Rojas superimposed over CT surface rendering of cranium. (Mandible is an estimated element based on average size and shape based on cranial form.) Smithsonian Institution



Facial reconstruction and photographic comparison. Note lines of association for the nose, eyes and upper orbit locations between photograph and reconstructed face. Smithsonian Institution



Cartes de Visite of Antonio Rojas. Smithsonian Institution

well as Mexican generals and individuals involved in the resistance. The album was acquired from a family in Toulouse, France, whose ancestor may have been a soldier in the French army. Most of the photographs had already been sold; the Rojas image was one of the few remaining.

This photograph not only provided an image of Rojas, it also gave some detail of his facial physiognomy that could be compared to the Smithsonian’s cranium. Today, photographs are routinely used for facial recognition in security and in forensic anthropology. An individual’s identification is sometimes supported by the comparison of photographs of the live individual to the skull of the deceased. Superimposing the photographic reference over the skull can show whether the facial features and cranial vault “match.”

Using the Siemens Somatom CT scanner in the Smithsonian's Department of Anthropology, a 3-dimensional surface rendering was made of the Rojas cranium. This surface-rendered image was then taken to the Forensic Imaging Section at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, where forensic artist Joe Mullins superimposed the 3-D cranial image over the photograph of Rojas.

To further assess the match to the photograph, Mullins used Free-Form layering software to virtually reconstruct the face. Eyes were placed back in orbits; nasal shape was estimated by the shape of the bony nasal aperture; eyebrows were located along orbital ridges, mouth edges and forehead; and facial "tissue" was applied using standards derived from the study of living and dead individuals for skin and muscle tissue thicknesses.

As can be seen in the figures above, the photograph of Rojas and the placement of the various features of the face on the skull are suggestively close. The missing mandible makes a more accurate estimation of overall facial shape and size comparisons difficult, but the forehead, eye placement, nose alignment and mouth/tooth alignment are entirely consistent with a match.

In visual assessment of the photograph of Antonio Rojas, his facial features seem neither very coarse nor ponderous, nor does the face's size appear large (though there are no external references to confirm this supposition). Visual assessment of the cranium conforms to the somewhat delicate features of Rojas's face, his high forehead, small cheekbones and small-sized vault. Visual assessment of the shape of the forehead and forwardness of the cheekbones are indicative of populations of Mexico and Central America. Craniometric analysis of the cranium using ForDisc 3 discriminant analysis supports the visual assessment of an individual with indigenous admixture. This analysis places this individual in the population samples of Guatemalans or other Hispanic populations with Mexican and Central American indigenous ancestry.

From the above results, it is reasonable to assume that the human cranium sold to the Army Medical Museum by Eugène Boban in 1887 is at least a

cranium of an individual from Central American populations and is quite consistent with the photograph of Antonio Rojas. With some certainty then, this is the cranium of General Antonio Rojas, killed on January 28, 1865, by one of his own men in a skirmish with French forces led by Captain Berthelin. The Smithsonian's earlier identification of the skull as female is likely a result of the skull's size, which, while small, is within lower statistical range of a nineteenth-century Mexican male. The depiction above of Rojas riding his horse is lacking scale, but suggests that the bandit chief may have been a diminutive demon. Despite the problematic history of Boban's skull collections and sales, the warnings of Wilson Wilberforce Blake and the misgivings of William Henry Holmes, Rojas's skull appears to be authentic, and we can only trust that Boban told the truth about how and where he got it.

Whether or not that changes Boban's larger story is another matter. The self-taught amateur archaeologist understood a great deal about Mexican history and pre-history, but he was also a businessman whose flair for a dramatic story enhanced the value of his wares. He had purchased the religious paintings, statuary and other items from demolished churches, and so would certainly have known the smaller rock crystal skulls in his possession were not ancient Aztec. Creating new and exotic identities for these Spanish Catholic religious objects, however, would bring much higher prices, especially if sold alongside much larger, and more expensive, versions. He might even have rationalized that the Spanish Catholic clergy had somehow incorporated Aztec carvings into their own iconography—and that the crystal skulls he sold did, somewhere, really exist.

So hope many today, not thinking of the darker side of his cranial prestidigitation. Boban had returned to Mexico in hopes of sharing his collection and his knowledge with the Mexican people, but also for more mercenary reasons. He named his institute the Museo Científico perhaps to curry favor with the ruling elite, the Científicos, and their Inspector of Monuments, Leopoldo Batres, who gave Boban renewed access to Mexico's archaeological riches. When Boban fled Mexico for New York, it was with numerous pre-Columbian artifacts that he had acquired from archaeological

sites under Batres's control, presumably with the complicity of the inspector. He also carried the contents of graves from throughout the country, including that of a fierce bandit who had fought Boban's French countryman and now resides in a Smithsonian storage unit in Maryland.

Boban, by contrast, is gone, and his legacy as a self-taught scholar, the gatherer of a number of still important collections of artifacts, books and manuscripts from Mexico is sometimes clouded by his truth-stretching. After he sold his Mexican skulls to the Army Medical Museum, he received news that his aunt, Henriette Duvergé, who had taken charge of his Paris shop, had died. He returned home to resume his buying and selling and opened yet another establishment. In 1888, within a few months of his return, he sold his entire Mexican archaeological collection and what was left of his library, to Eugène Goupil, a wealthy industrialist, who had been born in Mexico. Boban would become Goupil's curator, and assisted him in acquiring the most important collection of Mexican pictorial manuscripts in the world. Goupil published a sumptuous three-volume work on the manuscripts; the author of this catalogue *raisonné* was Eugène Boban. It was his crowning achievement and remains an important source to this day. The antiquarian married for a third time in 1895, and continued selling artifacts until his death in 1908. He was buried in Montparnasse cemetery, but over time the plot was not maintained, presumably because he left no heirs.*

His remains were eventually removed to a nearby ossuary.

*Boban was instrumental in convincing Goupil's widow to donate some four hundred manuscripts, purchased from J. M. A. Aubin in 1889, to the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1898. The collection constitutes the largest of its kind and is housed in the *Fonds Mexicains*.



Notes

1. I am indebted to the Hispanic Society of America in New York for allowing me to study and reproduce items from the manuscript collection of Eugène Boban. [JMW]

2. “Dans la même salle se trouvent, à l'état de spécimens et non au complet, les collections si remarquables de M. Pinart... On voit aussi une représentation de crâne humain en cristal de roche attribué à l'art mexicain: cette pièce provient de la collection Boban acquise par M. Pinart. Mais l'authenticité en paraît douteuse.”

3. The mummies were purchased from Jesús Sánchez of the National Museum of Mexico where they had been kept since their discovery following the demolition of the monastery of Santo Domingo during Juárez's reforms. Rather than victims of the Inquisition, they were more likely Dominicans who had been buried in the monastery. Eugène Boban, *Catalogue of the extensive archaeological of Monsieur Eugène Boban* (New York: Ed. Frossard and Charles Sotheran; Geo. A. Leavitt & Co., 1886), 34.

I am very much indebted to Pascal Riviale, for introducing me to Boban's correspondence in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, and also for bringing this photograph to my attention.

4. “On the subject of the provenance of the skulls—numbers 1372 - 1374 - 1368 - 1383 - 1375 - 1377 - 1370 - 1385 - these eight skulls come from the Chenapan [rascal, scalawag] Leopoldo Batres ... He had assured me of the provenance of these skulls and said that he wished to form an anthropological collection of ancient Mexican races for the museum of Mexico and do a publication on this subject [of which he is perfectly incapable]. A little time before my departure from Mexico a certain person named Swans came to my shop—he was interested in natural history ... On seeing the skulls in question he said these skulls, I recognize them, we dug them up a little while ago in the little Indian village near the Villa de Guadalupe ... to rectify this, ... I now classify them in my catalogue as Valley of Mexico ... Moreover, with a bit of attention one would remark that these skulls have certainly the same racial characteristics, and above all the same patina, the same color, produced by the same milieu.” Boban, Paul Broca's former student, turned out to be a keen observer. Studies today confirm that the eight skulls Boban described indeed came from the same location. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 7084, William Henry Holmes papers 1870-1931.

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Death of a Sailor:

A Novel History of Murder in 1830s New York, War and Forbidden Love in the Age of Napoleon, and Captivity and Freedom in the Last Days of the Atlantic Slave Trade; in many, many Parts.

By Christopher Heaney

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EDITOR'S NOTE: While unrequired, chapter 1 of this narrative may be read in our previous issue, *The Appendix*, vol. 1, no. 1.



PART I: The Murderer and the Journalist

Chapter 2: The Hoaxers

It is the evening of June 2, 1836, and Richard Adams Locke, editor of the New York newspaper *The Sun*, listens as a surgeon tells the court how Helen Jewett was murdered. Locke is the surgeon's friend, and has likely heard it already. How on a cold Sunday morning in April, the coroner called Dr. David L. Rogers to Jewett's bedroom in a brothel in downtown Manhattan. How Dr. Rogers and a fellow doctor moved Jewett's body from her half-burnt bed to the floor. How they probed the wounds on her forehead. How Rogers, a thirty-six year-old "operator of rare dexterity, and consummate skill," sliced Jewett's corpse from neck to pelvis and examined her insides.¹

Does the prosecution ask whether Dr. Rogers knew Jewett, a prostitute, before she died? They do not. The historian Patricia Cline Cohen, who read Dr. Roger's report, considers it possible

that Dr. Rogers had visited Jewett, a well-read and charming twenty-two-year-old who began life as Dorcas Doyen, a servant girl in Maine. Jewett had one unknown doctor friend, and Dr. Rogers ministered to prostitutes, living not far from Jewett's brothel.

Was she unfamiliar to his friend, Richard Adams Locke? She was not. Locke wrote in *The Sun* of "her well-known reputation for beauty, intelligence, accomplishments, and gentility of appearance."

The prosecution presents Dr. Rogers with a hatchet found behind the brothel where Jewett lived and died. Does he recognize it?

He does not, but Dr. Rogers, who has testified in murder cases since he was nineteen, says that Jewett's wounds are consistent with the blade.

Also found was a cloak. Both cloak and hatchet are linked to the young clerk on trial today, Richard P. Robinson, a nineteen-year-old in a new blue suit twirling his cap in the front row.

Does Locke, the journalist for *The Sun*, think that Robinson did it?

Jewett's fellow prostitutes at the brothel, along with their guests, placed Robinson, Jewett's on-again-off-again lover, in her room in the hours before her body was discovered. A source at the Police Office let Locke read and publish excerpts from Robinson's journal, which revealed a two-faced, amoral braggart "engaged in fantasies of power and contagion." Alternate explanations beggar belief. *The Sun*, the city's pioneering penny paper, ridiculed *The Herald*—run by Locke's nemesis, James Gordon Bennett—when it ran a confessional letter from the "real killer," who claimed to have hid under the bed while Jewett and Robinson slept, and to have killed the prostitute without waking the clerk, to frame him.

Locke doesn't think that Robinson did it; he knows he did.

And yet—

—the trial goes poorly. Over the next four days, Locke watches as Robinson's defense team outclasses the prosecution time and again. Robinson's journal is ruled inadmissible. Jewett's ghostly voice is forbidden: letters between Jewett and Robinson—which devolve from passionate love to Robinson's thinly veiled threats, to Jewett's knowledge of some undefined wrong-doing by Robinson—are ruled inadmissible. The defense produces a shop owner who "remembers" that Robinson spent the evening smoking in his store. The killing stroke comes late the last day when the judge tells the jury to give more weight to that shop owner than to Jewett's friends, who admitted Robinson to Jewett's room, and saw him there shortly before her body was discovered.

Why?

Because they are women, and they are prostitutes, and this is New York in 1836.

The jury returns: not-guilty. Robinson heads to Texas, to make a new life.*

Is Locke surprised?

He and *The Sun* spend the next several weeks working leads that the prosecution had fumbled. Locke breaks Robinson's alibi and finds a second false alibi waiting in the wings. *The Sun* concludes that Robinson had been embezzling from his employer, had killed another young woman, and had killed Jewett to keep those secrets.²

But is Locke surprised?

He is not. Locke knows a lie's anatomy, inside and out. He is notorious for it.



It is two months earlier, February 25, 1836, and Richard Adams Locke watches as his friend Dr. Rogers slices open the 161-year-old African-American Joice Heth.

Who, while living, had been exhibited by Phineas T. Barnum as the "oldest specimen" living of our human species.³

Who was a "living automaton," said skeptics.

Who sang, performed, and talked of her time as George Washington's nursemaid.

Who was still a slave when she died, having made ten to twelve thousand dollars for Barnum while living.

Who, now dead, is making seven hundred dollars more for Barnum in ticket sales.

* Would Robinson forget Helen Jewett?

"I have often wished I possessed your amiable disposition," Jewett once wrote to Robinson, flattering him, but also already in love. "[I]t is one which will through life recommend you to the notice of the sensible and refined, beside which you have such a happy faculty of rendering yourself agreeable, witty and amusing, that whatever society you may come in contact, you cannot fail to please."

But no, Robinson did not. At the very least, he talked about the "unjust" trial he had gone through out East. At his florid most, he died delirious on the Ohio River in 1855, raving in his final hours over 'Helen'. Yet even to Jewett's most empathetic historian, that story "sounds suspiciously concocted."

‡ There is danger in reproducing moments like these, in which the power of white, educated men, allows them to plumb and explore the bodies of the less powerful, female and black in the name of progressive science. In deciding to depict the dissection of Joice Heth, and the autopsy of Helen Jewett, I grappled with that danger but I tend towards Benjamin Reiss's thinking in the *Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), on how and why to depict the further bodily humiliation of Joice Heth: that "to pass over the climax of spectacular abuse and degradation in this story would obscure a central ethical question," which was whether entertainment itself could be a "lynching," 137-138. By including these moments, like Reiss, I hope the reader catches himself or herself looking, feels that queasiness, and wonders at their own complicity.

How did she end up beneath Dr. Roger's knife?

Dr. Rogers, the resident surgeon at New York Hospital, asked Barnum for the opportunity to perform Heth's autopsy if she died in America. Once, New Yorkers rioted when they discovered medical students 'resurrecting' the recently dead for dissection. Now, Dr. Rogers—himself trained by one famed bodysnatcher—has easy access to the dead marginalized by the law: murder victims, blacks, the poor, and criminals. Dr. Rogers often dissects them in public. His friend Locke had hoped that "poor old Joice Heth should have been sacred from [such] exposure and mutilation," but acknowledged the autopsy's value for "anatomical science."[‡]

And perhaps his friend's career?

There are fifteen hundred paying New Yorkers in the audience today, likely Dr. Roger's largest audience yet.

Dr. Rogers makes the incision. What does he find?

With his hands inside the frail frame that many claimed was a puppet, Dr. Rogers finds little of the ossification expected of a person of such great age. Heth's viscera are healthy. Heth's heart is healthy. Heth's skull resists unfolding, but her brain is healthy. Dr. Rogers finds that Heth died not of old age, but tuberculosis. He sets down his knife and gives his opinion: "Joice Heth could not have been more than seventy-five, or, at the utmost, eighty years of age!" The amphitheater rented by Barnum erupts, and Richard Adams Locke runs the news the next morning in *The Sun*.

Barnum claims innocence. Does anyone believe him?

Not when he and his accomplices are still fanning the flames. His assistant convinces *The Herald* that Barnum has just hoaxed Dr. Rogers; that Joice Heth is in fact alive and well in Connecticut. James Gordon Bennett, *The Herald's* dirt-seeking editor, takes the bait. He even accuses Dr. Rogers of being in on the trick—and of being involved in an even more famous hoax, from six months before.

And Heth?

Truly, she is dead, but her captive performance is never ending. Barnum later claims to have buried her "respectably" in Bethel, Connecticut, where Barnum was born, though records of her burial do not exist. Shortly after the autopsy, though, someone, perhaps Barnum, jokes to Locke, of *The Sun*, that Heth would be embalmed like a mummy and shipped overseas with the body of a "180-year-old" black man, to 'humbug' the English.

Again, is Locke, an Englishman himself, surprised?

Still, he is not. He knows this fraudulent play upon race and control, intimately. He has even performed in it. It was his humbug that the *Herald* said Dr. Rogers had co-authored.

Which was?

Six months before, Locke convinced almost all of New York that the moon was a paradise inhabited by unicorns and man-bats, and then tried to argue that that belief in a lunar paradise, real or not, cooled tempers over the most divisive issue in American history: the abolition of slavery.

'Man-bats'?



It is a morning in the last week in August 1835, and a crowd gathers outside the office of *The Sun*, despite the New



York summer's heat. Richard Adams Locke, Dr. David L. Rogers, and a few other friends watch from the doorway. There have been many crowds already this summer.⁴

Not crowds.

Mobs. Against the release of over two million black slaves owned in a country of thirteen million. Against the right of free, laboring, middle class blacks to form abolition groups with whites—and possibly marry them. Against abolitionism reaching the South. A looming reprise of the year before, when mobs in New York—a city swelling with cotton's profits, home to an estimated seven thousand Southerners—looted black homes and churches, rioted against English actors, broke up abolitionist meetings, and ransacked the homes of its wealthy leaders.

It was also about nationalism, then? And class?

The still-nascent American Anti-Slavery Society is not dissuaded. In 1835, the Society decides that to “sow the good seed of abolition thoroughly over the whole country”—and drum up funds—it would flood the South with 170,000 copies of antislavery literature.

How mad did the South get?

This was the summer that ‘Lynch’s law’ entered the national vocabulary; by the following year, ‘to lynch,’ the verb, was widespread.

Anti-abolitionist rallies intercept and burn the mail, along with effigies of white abolitionists Arthur Tappan and William Lloyd Garrison. Southerners call for Tappan’s extradition and hunt for antislavery material in cities’ black quarters. In Madison County, Mississippi, in July, a rumored slave insurrection is magnified and shredded through the deployment of lynch law, the torture of blacks and sympathetic whites, and the hanging of seven whites and many, many, many more blacks.*

* It was also four short years after Nat Turner led a slave rebellion in Virginia, ending with his execution, and the deaths of between one hundred to two hundred blacks. About sixty whites were killed by Turner’s band.

And in New York?

Silk merchant Tappan receives threatening letters daily, rumors swirling that New Orleans assassins lurked at street corners to perforate his lungs. The six-penny *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, read by the city’s wealthy, calls for New Yorkers “to crush the reptilian egg of abolition underfoot” before it brings on civil war.

And the city’s black abolitionists? What of them?

Tappan remains unhurt. National antislavery societies leap from 200 to 527. Record numbers of tracts and society handkerchiefs are sold.

Where is Locke and *The Sun* in all of this?

The New York *Sun* defends the abolitionists. Locke runs news of violence against Southern abolitionists and blacks, and gleefully cancels the subscription of a reader offended by *The Sun*’s pro-Abolition sentiment, adding a full-throated condemnation of slavery.

[I]f there are any more of our subscribers who think that to tell the truth is to be an abolitionist, we shall be happy to stop theirs also.

Was that why a crowd has gathered outside of *The Sun*’s offices this hot morning in late August? To cancel their subscriptions?

No. They were there for something more ... celestial.

On August 21, one day after Locke made his stand for ‘truth’ and abolition, *The Sun* ran a very small notice promising a major astronomical discovery.

On Wednesday, August 26, the city’s mayor and worthies announce a mass meeting for those “opposed to the incendiary proceedings of the abolitionists.”

On Wednesday, August 26, *The Sun* starts reprinting what it claims is a firsthand account from the “*Edinburgh Journal of Science*”: new findings from the improbably massive new telescope of the famed astronomer Sir John Herschel. In January, Herschel had trained that new telescope on the moon and found—

Paradise. A field of poppies—
—a lunar forest—

—an inland sea—

—bison-like animals, eyes protected from
sunlight by a “fleshy appendage”—

—a goat-sized unicorn.

Here the narrative breaks off, to be resumed
on Thursday.

On Thursday, ten thousand New Yorkers meet in a
park to reassure the South that the city won't tolerate
abolitionists' interference with the peace, rights and
the (north-flowing) trade of slaveholding states.

On Thursday, the moon narrative resumes,
briefly. And on Friday, the telescope revealed
the Moon's most surprising inhabitant: four-
foot tall copper-haired, translucent man-
bats.

Did they have a scientific name?

Vespertilio-homo. They conversed, flew and ex-
pressed affection in ways that required *The*
Sun to censor the *Edinburgh Journal's* text. Two
more varieties of man-bats will be found,
each more beautiful than the last.

Who believes?

According to Edgar Allan Poe, who takes
a competitive interest because he believes
someone at *The Sun* has plagiarized his own
moon fantasy: almost everyone. “[N]ot one
person in ten discredited” the story, “and
(strangest point of all!) the doubters were
chiefly those who doubted without being able
to say why—the ignorant—those uninformed
in astronomy—people who would not believe,
because the thing was so novel, so ‘entirely
out of the usual way.’”

Strangest point of all! Faith in science?

Or faith's place in science. Paradise on the
moon is a comforting thought.

The *Sun's* hollering newsboys sell out their
stacks, over and over. On Friday, the day that
man-bats take Manhattan, *The Sun's* publisher

reveals the moon story's effect on sales.
The Sun's circulation has hit 19,360—five
times what other New York newspapers
have ever sold daily. *The Sun* will sell as
many as sixty thousand copies of the
series' reprint—“equivalent, in today's
population, to over one million copies,”
one historian estimates.

What does that mean?

That *The Sun's* publisher is now a very,
very rich man.

And that while the mayor exhorts New
York to stand against the abolitionists,
one of the city's most radical papers is
“besieged by thousands of applicants,
from dawn to midnight,” demanding
fresh accounts of man-bats and moon-
dust.

But is none of it true?

The Sun's editor, Richard Adams Locke,
and his friends Dr. David L. Rogers and
William N. Griggs, watch the crowd
clamor. On that particular morning,
Griggs later remembers: “a highly re-
spectable-looking elderly gentleman, in
a fine broadcloth Quaker suit,” convin-
ces the crowd that the moon story was
true because he had seen the astronomer
Herschel's seven-ton telescope leaving
England's docks for South Africa.

Locke regards the man with a “look of
mingled astonishment and contempt.”⁵

How long does the enchantment last?

The series ends on Monday, August 31.
That same morning, dirt-hunting editor
James Gordon Bennett's *Herald* “praises”
Locke for such a marvelously construct-
ed fraud—and accuses him of getting
an English chambermaid pregnant, for
good measure.

James Gordon Bennett, ever charming.

Locke responds with an open letter to
the editor of the *Evening Star*. He fends off



the *ad hominem* accusation handily, but is cleverly cagey when it comes to the moon story. He hadn't made the discoveries, Locke writes, with lawyerly honesty.

Does Locke admit that the "Edinburgh Journal" does not exist?

Bennett's editorials continue, and Locke offers this instead:

We go from the genuineness of the discoveries because we like a sprinkle of the marvelous [sic] and because we hope that, by directing all eyes to the ladies and gentleman of the moon, there will be less devilment practiced on earth. We are curious to know whether *Lynch Law* exists amongst our Lunar neighbors, or whether they have not yet arrived at that degree of refinement!



It is Friday, September 4, 1835. On the corner of Broadway and Lispenard, someone sets fire to the bookstore of a black abolitionist and printer named David Ruggles.

For three nights in the week following, a white mob will gather before his store. He will relocate to Chapel Street, continue to sell *The Liberator*, educate blacks free and enslaved, and mentor Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth.*

But today is not a good day.



* Ruggles in 1835 had published a tract attempting to convince northern women to shun southern counterparts complicit with southern male sexual abuse of enslaved women. He preached black commitment to abolition, and made crucial inroads with black feminists.

It is Friday, September 4, 1835.
A pistol fires.

A woman screams.

And shortly after midnight, a night watchman rouses Dr. David L. Rogers from his sleep. One sailor has murdered another over the love of a woman, it seems. The murderer was apprehended at the scene, but there's an autopsy to be done.

Dr. Rogers walks from his home and office on Chambers St. to a boarding house on Monroe St. belonging to Mrs. Harriet A. Shoults.

He finds a sailor named John "Little Jack" Roberts, shot through the eye.

Does Dr. Rogers move Roberts' from the bed to the floor? Does he make an incision?

Roberts's dead body has been moved already, to a passageway. Rogers rolls Little Jack's body over to inspect the wound. The brain is "much torn." Dr. Rogers finds the ball on Mrs. Shoults's pillow. It "must have rolled out when the scull was taken off [sic]."

Is Locke at the coroner's inquest the next morning to see the murderer?

He is not. His fellow journalists say that Locke, who may have been fired from his last newspaper job for drinking, has been at the bar more often these days. Whether to celebrate, or from the pressure, is unclear.

Edgar Allan Poe later credits Locke's "genius" for the hoax's success, but Locke has perhaps realized that he has sold himself too cheap. The Sun's circulation remains unimaginably high, the reprints are selling out, and The Sun's publisher is making much more than the \$300 to \$500 that he paid Locke for the moon series, let alone the \$12 Locke gets per week.

Sometime over the next several weeks, over a drink with a fellow reporter, whose newspaper was about to reprint the Moon story, Locke comes clean. "Don't print it right

away," he says. "I wrote it myself." The reporter runs that story instead.

Was it only for the money? And who killed "Little Jack"?

It is Monday, September 14, and a play about lunar man-bats opens at the fashionable Bowery Theater to sold-out audiences. A character blows up a flock of man-bats "with a highly combustible bundle of abolitionist tracts."

The Sun approves. That Friday, without claiming authorship for what he only knows was a satire, not a hoax, Locke writes that the moon series had usefully "[diverted] the public mind, for a while, from that bitter apple of discord, the abolition of slavery." By giving the other newspapers something else to get angry about, Locke claimed, The Sun had prevented escalation of New York's rancorous war on abolition.[‡]

‡ In *The Sun and the Moon*, 274-277, Matthew Goodman makes much of the fact that in 1840 an older, more pickled Locke claimed that he had intended the whole series as a satire—as a parody of religious astronomers whose "pseudo philosophy" and devotion to dogma predicted life and paradise on the moon. His moon series had been an attempt to lampoon their beliefs, and teach the public to study nature without blinders, but he had *written it so well* that the fantasy landed, but the satire hadn't. "I am unaffectedly ashamed of it," wrote Locke, "not from any casuistry about it as a hoax, but because, in this very respect, it is so bungling a production."

In explaining the textual inspiration for Locke's moon series—from the discoveries of John Herschel to the widespread appreciation of those religious astronomers—Goodman makes an excellent case for Locke's attempt at satire. Yet at no point at the time, it seems, did Locke gesture in those directions. I tend to believe that Locke, as a writer, did indeed begin with a satire of religious astronomy, but, as an editor, he put it to two very different non-exclusive purposes: first and most obviously, to cause a sensation and raise the circulation of *The Sun*, making money for himself, temporarily, and for his publisher, over time. And second, I think he was genuinely waging war on New York's mounting crusade against abolition's crusaders by other, lighter means. Writing about man-bats on the moon was not writing about slavery—but 'not writing about slavery,' in such a charged moment, was also writing about slavery.

That's sophistry.

A book bound with cotton is also a slave on his stomach, breathing lightly, hoping the wounds across his spine might heal.

In any case, even if the Moon Hoax wasn't about abolition, it began in the midst of it, and was, strangely, marshaled to its cause. There were might not have been Paradise on the moon, but nor were there any lynchings.

Does he truly believe that? Why would anyone trust anything else he writes?

It is Tuesday, September 22, and Richard Adams Locke is in City Hall, in New York's Court of Oyer and Terminer. The court brings in the man accused of murdering John "Little Jack" Roberts, the sailor shot through the eye.⁶

The accused is named Richard Jackson, and he is also a sailor.

He is a sailor. His name is not 'Richard Jackson.' As Locke transcribes the proceedings in shorthand, he realizes that the case against Jackson is strong. His friend, Dr. David L. Rogers, is a witness for the prosecution.

What does Dr. Rogers say?

That he inspected Roberts' wound and matched the bullet he found to the gun taken off Jackson. That he cannot say whether the old three-inch scar on Jackson's head gradually made him insane. He sees no such symptoms. He "cannot say that dark swarthy complexioned men are more subject to insanity than persons of a light complexion; although those persons who are insane are generally dark complexioned men."

The District Attorney asks: why are the dark complexioned more insane?

"Because insanity usually effects [sic] the liver, and the disease of the liver is thrown back upon the skin," says Dr. Rogers, "and this is apt to produce a dark swarthy complexion."

Does Jackson, the "dark complexioned" man in question, defend himself?

He has said enough already. Other witnesses testify that he threatened to "blow out the brains of Roberts" over Harriet Shoults, with whom Jackson lives when he isn't at sea. Shoults herself testifies that she saw Jackson shoot Roberts. Eliza Seymour, who was also in the room that night, confirms the story.

Locke is nevertheless impressed by the "eloquent, pathetic" closing speech made by

Jackson's lawyer, arguing that his client is insane; that in madness he attempted to hang himself after his arrest.

Does it work?

The jury comes back with a verdict of Guilty. Richard Jackson is to be hanged by the State instead.

Does Jackson show remorse? Does he weep? Does Jackson know that Dr. David L. Rogers—
—who finds him dark-complexioned, but not insane—

—will be offered his body for dissection after the execution?

"The prisoner remained during the whole trial, which lasted till ten at night, in a reclining posture, and heard the verdict of the jury with dogged indifference, bordering on insensibility," claims the *New York Commercial Adviser*.

Jackson is led out of the courtroom. He will go to a small cell in Bellevue.

Locke walks out of the courtroom. It is the moon-hoaxer's thirty-fifth birthday.

Does he walk home to celebrate with his wife and daughter in their modest apartment on Franklin Street?

More likely that he walks to *The Sun* to write up the trial for the next day's paper. He is curious. There are two stray threads hanging from Jackson's story. He will pull them.

The first?

Goes in his trial account for *The Sun*: that Jackson, in an earlier examination, had revealed that had been born in Portugal. It follows that his name likely isn't 'Richard Jackson'.

This on its own isn't notable—

—it's simply New York. Many sailors, who come and go with the tides, are born far from the Isle of Mannahatta, and adopt Anglo names at their convenience.

But the second fact?

Changes the first. Locke keeps this one to himself. Jackson is a more interesting sailor than most, it seems. He had been tried in Boston, a few years before, for Piracy.

From man-bats to pirates!

A wonderful birthday present to open, and write about, provided that Locke gets to it before his friend Dr. Rogers opens Jackson's ribs.

But after everything that's happened, who will trust a hoaxing journalist with the story of a murderer waiting to die? Who will believe it?

It is after midnight, September 23, 1835, and a sailor whose name is not Richard Jackson, who could not afford good lawyers, who likely does not know his birthday, whose body is no longer his, faces one of his last nights on earth.

Does he weep?

Will we believe it?



Notes

1. This opening scene is reliant on Patricia Cline Cohen's excellent book, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*.
2. Cohen casts doubt on the likelihood that Jewett would have continued to see Robinson had she known that he had killed another woman.
3. The following scene is drawn from "Dissection of Joice Heth – Precious Humbug Exposed," *The Sun*, February 26, 1836. The larger story of P.T. Barnum and Joice Heth is most amply and critically told in Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death, and Memory in Barnum's America*.
4. The following scene outside *The Sun's* office, and all unattributed quotes that follow in the narrative, are drawn from William N. Griggs, *The Celebrated "Moon Story," Its Origins and Incidents* (New York: Bunnell & Price, 1852), 22-26.
5. This incredible moment comes from Griggs, *The Celebrated "Moon Story," Its Origins and Incidents*, 23-24.
6. The scene following, unless otherwise noted, is drawn from "Court of Oyer and Terminer and Circuit," *The New York Sun*, 23 September 1835.



Drumnadrochit Village Green in the 1920s
Glenurquhart Heritage Group

Drumnadrochit, Scotland

Janet Bell and Duncan Macdonald

In this edition's local history section, Jan Bell and Duncan Macdonald, longtime residents of Drumnadrochit, Scotland, offer a brief history of their village. Drumnadrochit is located in the Scottish Highlands by the River Enrick and near the western shore of Loch Ness. Long before it became famous for a certain mythical monster, the town hosted a thriving market and cattle auctions, and the Estate that encompassed much of the area employed a large portion of the local population. One building in particular stands as witness to the town's different eras: it has been a courthouse, a rent collection center, an inn for visitors during hunting season, and in its present incarnation, it houses the Loch Ness Monster Exhibition.



The original settlement of Drumnadrochit, whose name comes from the Gaelic for “the ridge of the bridge,” grew up in the seventeenth century at the natural crossing point of the River Enrick, which flows through Glen Urquhart and into Loch Ness. The Green was formerly the site of a market for cattle and sheep. The complete house on the left is the oldest, dating from the 1830s. The Joinery workshop on the right is now a café, and some of the houses have been converted into bed and breakfast businesses and a restaurant. Drumnadrochit has become a tourist-oriented village, as seen at top right.

The neighboring village of Lewiston lies alongside the River Coilty. Much of Glen Urquhart was part of the Balmacaan Estate owned by the Grant family of Seafeld (whose principal estate was in Cul-

len, Morayshire). The Estate was bestowed on the Grants by King James IV of Scotland in 1509 and remained in the family's ownership until 1946. In 1803, Sir James Grant provided houses with some land for his tenants and named the village Lewiston after his eldest son, Lewis.

The heyday of Balmacaan Estate was in the 1880s and 1890s when it was rented to Bradley Martin, one of that new breed of wealthy American industrialists who held many Highland sporting tenancies at the end of the nineteenth century. Around forty local people had permanent employment as gamekeepers, gardeners, and domestic servants at the Estate.

Bradley Martin's season was a glittering affair, beginning with his arrival in Inverness in a specially hired train with luggage, silver plate, horses and vehicles, as well as family and staff. His entertainments were legendary and Grand Duke Michael of Russia was one notable houseguest. Mrs Martin is seen photographing the line-up as the entourage leaves at the end of the season. After 1920 the fortunes of Balmacaan, along with the Seafields, declined. In 1946, the estate was sold piecemeal and many of the local people were able to buy their holdings at a reasonable price. The big house was allowed to fall into disrepair and was finally demolished in 1972.

The Martin family were popular residents, contributing generously to many community projects, notably the building of the Public Hall in 1906, still in regular use. This picture shows the village children marching onto the cricket field, now the playing field used for the annual Highland Games and for games of shinty—a long-established Highland stick and ball sport similar to hockey (and, some believe, taken by Highland emigrants to Canada and USA where it evolved as ice hockey). Alongside the children is a band brought from Inverness. The village later enjoyed various entertainments such as a money scramble, eats, and a fireworks display, all arranged by Fred Martin, Bradley's brother.



Drumnadrochit, today
Duncan Macdonald, photographer



Lewiston—an Estate Village
Duncan Macdonald, photographer



Keepers on Balmacaan Estate with stags
Heritage Group



The Roman Carnival
Heritage Group



The Old Inn, Drumnadrochit
Heritage Group



John Cobb and Loch Ness
Castrol Photo Archive

For his attempt to beat the world water speed record in 1952, John Cobb chose Loch Ness and Temple Pier became the headquarters for his team. Cobb was an underwriter for Lloyds and a fur broker in London whose wealth allowed him to indulge his appetite for speed. A specially constructed shed housed his boat, called "Crusader," and the entire support team is shown standing in front, with Cobb in the centre of the group wearing a cap. In the weeks before the attempt, many visitors, including the Queen Mother, came to watch. On the 26th of September, Crusader hit waves, probably from a support vessel, and Cobb was catapulted out and killed instantly. This was a huge blow to the community, to whom he had endeared himself, particularly by allowing no work on Sundays, in deference to local custom. The community later erected a cairn above the spot of the accident.



End of the Season at Balmacaan
Duncan Macdonald

Originally owned by the Balmacaan Estate, the inn was used for a Justice of the Peace court and for rent collection from the estate's tenants, as well as providing accommodation for travelers and guests who came during the shooting season. It was extensively renovated in 1882, and, following a fire in the 1980s, it now houses the Official Loch Ness Monster Exhibition.

Bespelled in the Archives

Lisa Smith

I grimaced, examining the neat box of pale blue cardboard in front of me. Manuscript number 4171? This wasn't the one I'd ordered, and I was conscious of my rapidly passing research week. With only a couple hours left until the library closed, I wouldn't be able to order the correct manuscript before the next day. I shrugged, deciding that it was a sign—take a quick look, leave early.

The manuscript seemed unusual, even as I opened the small box to unwrap the book's protective layer of thick, creamy archival paper. Not much

larger than a slim paperback, it was bound inside a recycled French legal document from 1716: smooth, stiff vellum with faded writing, its front cover marred by a burn from some long-ago stray cinder. The title was intriguing: *Recueil de différents secrets* ("Collection of Different Secrets"). The real treat, though, was on the inner leaf. Two book plates indicated that the manuscript had been owned by the famous occult historian, Émile Grillob de Givry "Kabbaliste" (1874-1929), who had written a short account of its acquisition. Grillob de Givry's own discovery of the manuscript had been as serendipitous as mine.¹

*Le manuscrit a été acheté par moi à
une sorcière du village de Conques à une
lieue et demie de Carcassonne. J'étais
allé à ce village par suite d'une confusion
croyant y trouver la splendide basilique de
Conques (Aveyron). La vieille tour carrée de l'église
et le château en ruines étaient assez intéressants.
La sorcière demeurait dans une maison isolée sur la
route de Villemoust aussou à Conques. Elle avait
aussi une Clavicule de Salomon, manuscrite qu'elle n'a
pas voulu me céder. La couverture de parchemin de ce
manuscrit est un acte notarié où l'on distingua la date de 1716, 30 septembre.²*

The manuscript was bought by me from a witch in the village of Conques a league and a half from Carcassonne. I had gone to this village due to a confusion believing I'd find there the splendid basilica of Conques (Aveyron). The old square tower of the church and the chateau in ruins were interesting enough. The witch lived in an isolated house on the route between Villemoust and Conques. She also had a Key of Solomon, a manuscript that she did not want to let me have. The parchment cover of this manuscript is a notarial act in which one makes out the date of 1716, 30 September.

A witch. A kabbalist. A magic book.

I was hooked.

Flicking through the pages, I spotted recipes and charms to find lost objects, cure nosebleeds, prevent animals from eating, hold snakes, and—of course—make someone love you. But there was so little time.

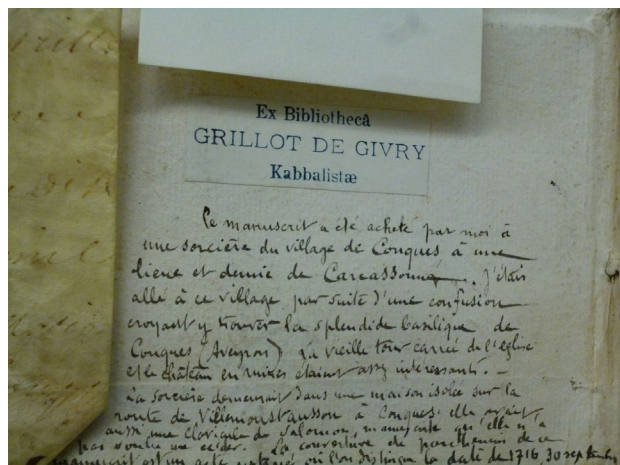


What had intrigued me most, as I sped through the fragile pages, was the slippage between magic and religion in the manuscript.

The eighteenth century is often studied as part of ‘the Enlightenment,’ treated as a period when people moved away from ‘superstition’ (as Enlightenment thinkers would have disparagingly termed it) to rationalism. The Catholic Church, which was aware of the overlap between religion and magic, had long been concerned with magical practices that involved divination or invoking demons. Historian Keith Thomas, for example, suggested that the shift started during the Reformation when the power of sacraments such as the Eucharist was dismissed by Protestants.

A witch. A kabbalist.
A magic book.
I was hooked.

The true extent of change is questionable; Stephen Wilson has shown that many European magical beliefs persisted through the nineteenth century. That the educated elites and the general populace developed an increasingly different worldview is clear, though. Or at least that is what the educated elites were determined to believe. An educated physician and a cunning-man—a folk healer—had more in common than either



“The manuscript was bought by me from a witch in the village of Conques.”

Émile Grillot de Givry’s account of how he came to possess WMS 4171.

Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London.

Photograph by the author.

would have liked to admit. In the mid-eighteenth century, for example, physician Vivant-Augustin Ganiare observed epidemics and weather closely to uncover God’s secrets. Ganiare believed that God had left patterns in nature for man to discover, which would provide man with solutions for controlling disease.

This was not entirely different from a peasant who used secret charms (often religious) to protect his cattle from disease and crops from withering. At the same time as the study of natural philosophy became popular among the French educated elite, those lower down the social scale were purchasing the cheap almanacs, magic books and hagiographies sold by pedlars (the Bibliothèque Bleue). Learned natural philosophy and popular magic each tried to explain and to manipulate the natural world.

Years later, when I finally returned to this curious manuscript, I had become more intrigued than ever by the ambiguities of the Enlightenment. The manuscript beckoned. Now, I had more time and, armed with Twitter and Storify, was able to share my delight and disgust in equal measures as I tried to understand the little book and its magical recipes.³

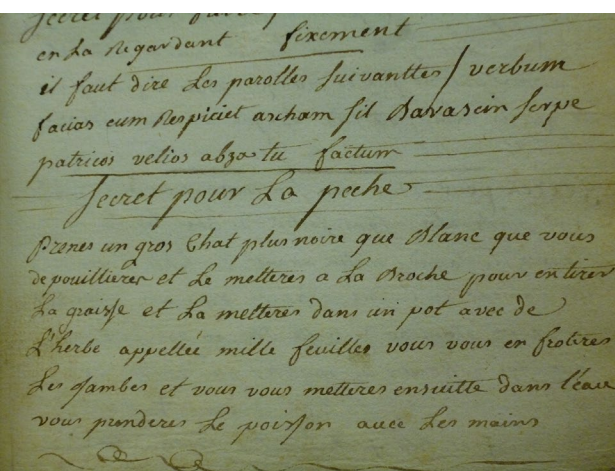
A secret to repel snakes advised throwing a blank piece of paper (folded into four) at the snake, while saying “Stop yourself, beast! Here is a forfeit!” and “ozi, ozia, ozi.”

Secret pour arreter les serpents

il faut prendre un morceau de papier Blanc quil
faut ployer en quatre en disant arrette toi
Bette voila un Gage vous lui jetteres en prononçant
Les dittes parolles on dit de plus—ozi—ozia—ozi.

These were heavy demands. Few people carry a blank piece of paper with them, let alone are able to fold it quickly and throw it in the length of time it takes a snake to get close. The rationale, at least in part, was clear—the snake was being offered a substitute victim.

The boundary between magic and religion was permeable in pre-modern Europe, which might also explain the charm. The number four might suggest the points of the cross, the transliteration of the Hebrew name for God (YHWH), the Biblical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), or the elements (earth, water, wind and fire). There are religious hints as well in the “Ozi-ozia-ozi”, which perhaps was derived from the name of a Biblical king, Uzziah (Latin: Ozias). A powerful ruler, Uzziah designed wall-defences to shoot arrows and hurl stones—hence the thrown paper—but his pride led to a fall, rather like Satan (represented by the snake). This seemingly religion-free recipe only makes sense when considered within a religious context.⁴



The manuscript's 'secret for fishing' involved doing unwholesome things to “a large cat, more black than white.”

Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London. Photograph by the author.

Not all spells were religious: many overlapped with medical ideas. To be successful at catching fish, for example, one recipe recommended that the reader “take a large cat, more black than white, skin it and put it on the roasting spit.” Mix the fat drippings with some yarrow, then “rub your legs and go next into the water. You will catch the fish with your hands.”

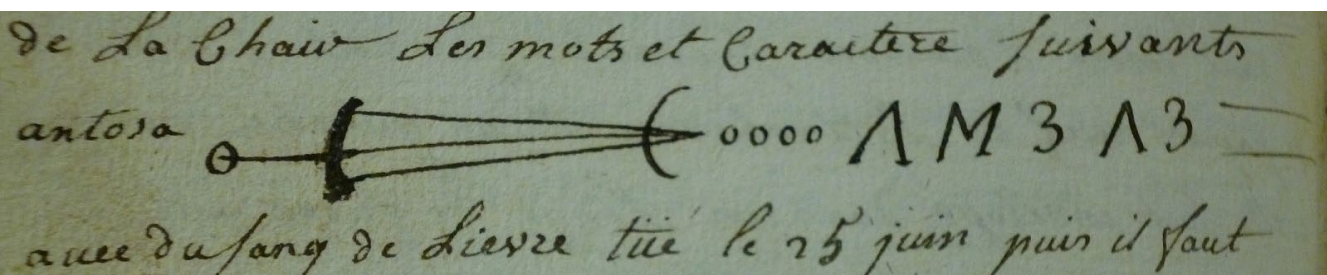
Secret pour la Peche

Prenez un gros chat plus noire que blanc que vous
de pouillieres et le metteres a la Broches pour en tires
La graisse et la metteres dans un pot avec de
L'herbe appelee mille feuilles vous vous en froteres
Les jambes et vous vous metteres ensuite dans l'eau
vous prenderez le poisson avec les mains.

The use of animal parts—including those of puppies, kittens, and other cute creatures—was not unusual in early modern medicine. Indeed, there was much overlap between magical and medicinal properties. Within the wider worldview, every person and object was a balance of hot, cold, wet and dry properties. Puppies at once represented youth, warmth and moistness and so would be good for, say, diseases of age, which were cold and dry. Magic extended the possibility of transference even further. The logic of the spell for fishing was that the cat's skill in catching fish could be directly transferred to the human.⁵

The *Recueille* reflects a close relationship between magic, medicine and religion, but to get a sense of it as a whole, I counted and categorised the entries. There are 169 entries, sixty-seven (40%) of which are about medicine or medicinal ingredients. Forty (24%) aim to control people in some way, from making them fall in love to stopping enemies. Another thirty-seven (22%) focused on controlling nature, such as talking to the animals or summoning birds. Only five entries included divinatory or spirit-summoning activities. The remainder dealt with:

- luck (winning the lottery, escaping from prison or finding lost objects);
- weapons (avoiding injury from firearms and swords);
- mind or body (improving memory, seeing the invisible, or reading in the dark).



A magical symbol in WMS 4171

Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London. Photograph by the author.

The charms in the manuscript—narratives, images and symbols—are similar to much older ones, as well as to others from the eighteenth century that appeared in printed books.

The book intended to be useful on a daily basis rather than for arcane or demonic knowledge, allowing glimpses into eighteenth-century rural life. The concerns revealed are unsurprising, as magic was an attempt to control the uncontrollable. Keeping foxes and wolves away. Removing the pain of teething children. Preventing chimney and field fires. Staying safe from thunder and lightning. Ensuring pregnancy. Making someone fall in love. More surprising, though, were ten spells to avoid being harmed by weapons and one to escape recruitment by ballot for the militia. The countryside had its human dangers, too.

Secret pour empecher de tomber a la milice

Lorsquil sera question d'aller tire au sort pour la
Milice il faut Lorsque Lon vous appellera a
votre tour marcher a grand pas et etant arrivee
au Chapeau ou autre chose dans Le quel feront
Les Billiets profers les parolles suivants tout
Bas en tirant dans le Chapeau, et en faissant
un signe de Croix + avec le d[oi]g[it] index en disant)
Jesus passant par le milieu deux son alloit) et
Consumation est.

Secret for preventing [one from] falling to the militia

If there is the question of going to draw lots for the Militia, it is necessary that when your turn is called, you walk with large steps and, having arrived at the hat or other thing in which the tickets are, utter in a whisper, holding it in the hat and making the sign of the Cross + with the index finger, saying (Jesus passing by the middle two his success) and it is fulfilled.

giving the drunk a glass. A charm “to maintain the peace in a house between husband and wife or other person” involved saying Latin fragments of prayer: “peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, between us through the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”

Another compared anger within the household to a betrayal. When someone in the household or family was “in a bad humour or choler against you, it is necessary to whisper the following words, ‘Oh man appease your fury and your heat, as Judas lost his colour when betraying our Lord. The word became flesh.’”

The charm also suggests an early modern way of understanding anger: as much physical as emotional, and something that undermined family stability. Reading these charms, though, I could only imagine how bad a situation must have been for a person to look for magical assistance in restoring household peace. The willingness to use protective magic suggests that the threat posed to domestic stability by family disharmony was significant indeed.⁶

These examples suggest that magic did not exist in opposition to religious faith, but relied on it. At one point, the author even stressed the importance of making confession within a day of one spell designed to prevent fire. The charm, which was “very dangerous for the soul”, involved drawing a cross and writing one’s baptismal name in blood taken from the right little finger. Religious belief—mingled with these ‘superstitions’—offered a meaningful framework for modelling relationships, understanding the natural world, and solving problems.

The most poignant entries were to restore domestic harmony. To make a drunk hate wine, for example, one might mix eels in a vat of wine, later



It is difficult to know why these charms were written down, or by whom. The manuscript is written in one legible hand and is in generally good French, which suggests the author had some education. At least part of the book was copied from a famous magic book, the *Enchiridion Leonis Papae*, as a note indicates: “fin des secrets de l’Enchiridion”. There is also the possibility that, for some of the text, the author had collected local folk knowledge out of interest. The author did not always take the charms seriously. The secret for understanding the language of animals included going into the forest at the end of autumn, then cooking the first animal and bird that had been killed in a stew seasoned with fox heart. After eating the stew, “you can persuade yourself that this secret will be good.” A strange choice of words.

Other remedies suggest a form of counseling. In a charm to know whether or not a wife was faithful, a husband might put a fine diamond under her pillow while she slept. The unfaithful wife would wake up frightened, but a wise wife “will kiss him lovingly.” To know the name of the seducer, the husband should “take the heart of a turtle and the head of a frog,” dried and pulverised, and throw the powder on his sleeping wife’s stomach. While sleep-talking, his wife would reveal “what he wants to know, or rather what he might like to ignore it for his own happiness.” Excellent advice. As Keith Thomas suggested, many such spells relied on a practitioner’s knowledge of the people involved. An observant wife, innocent or guilty, was already likely aware of her husband’s suspicions, while a wise husband might consider more deeply his need to know at all emotional and financial costs.⁷

There are some hints that WMS 4171 may have been a working book. The burn on its cover evokes an image of someone leaving it near the hearth fire or a candle, perhaps after reading it. The *Recueil* was typical of other contemporary recipe collections with its emphasis on remedies. Although the recipes do not appear to be organised, the list of medicinal materials and their properties forms a significant and coherent section in the middle of the manuscript. This would have been useful for quick reference. Writing down the recipes in a personal book, particularly those from the *Enchiridion*, might even have heightened their power

for the user.

Two charms even specified that they have been “proved,” which meant that they had been tried and found good. One was a secret to stop a field fire. Another aimed to persuade people to disarm, cautioning that it should not be tried when people were drinking. The first one entailed whispering a series of prayers, some in Latin and each in multiples of three, into the burning fire. The instructions began, “it is necessary to say the following words 3 times 3: Blessed St. John hear my request. Accord me, I beg you, the power to stop this fire by my breath.” After saying the Benediction three times, “blow the fire three times.” The rest of the prayers could be undertaken from a safe distance “without any dangers.” This one included an important number, a saint and the breath of life—and was practical, too, allowing the charmer to do work from a safe distance.

The second charm required collecting the white skin from the tongue of a newborn on a clean piece of paper or linen, which was then secretly placed under the infant’s bonnet during baptism. Bodily secretions and human body parts were regular components in both medicine and magic, such as feces to treat eye problems, human skull incorporated in epilepsy remedies, or the “hand of glory” (a preserved hand from an executed man) to unlock doors magically. The charm for putting down weapons would have worked on multiple levels, with the newborn representing the liminal states of new life, baptism and innocence, as well as literally embodying a Biblical verse: “out of the mouths of babes and sucklings” (Matthew 21:16). The tongue, with its ability to curse or bless, was considered a potent body part. A strong charm, indeed, bringing together body and soul, magic and religion.⁸

Neither of the approved charms was any less magical than the spells for talking to the animals or sleeping wives. Each blurred seemingly religious actions with magical enhancements: a focus on specific numbers or a devious method of obtaining a sacramental blessing. If the book was being used, it was being used for its magic as well as its remedies.



For the historian, decoding the underlying rationale of the individual secrets is the easy part. Making sense out of a text and trying to identify its use without the details of its original context is a challenging business. The manuscript does not yield its own secrets readily.

And so we return to Grillot de Givry and the mysterious *sorcière*. Just as the manuscript gives little away, so too does Grillot de Givry. How did he know the woman was a witch? Or did he simply assume it because she had magical books in her possession and lived in an isolated house? And why did she refuse to sell the *Key of Solomon*, a well-known magic book?

That she was so willing to part with the *Recueil* suggests that she didn't find it useful, although Grillot de Givry, with 'Kabbaliste' so proudly emblazoned after his name, clearly anticipated it might be. If the woman was a witch, the magic she practiced had moved on since the eighteenth century—even though the eighteenth-century practices had remained remarkably consistent from medieval ones. If she wasn't a witch, perhaps her reluctance to sell the *Key of Solomon* was a failed ploy to persuade Grillot de Givry to raise his offer. She might have done better taking a chance with the old ways. Tucking a red swallow stone in her mouth during negotiations would, the manuscript assures us, have allowed her to obtain “anything that you ask of someone.”

In any case, Grillot de Givry left the village pleased with his purchase, and I left the archives, pleased with my day's work. Both of us were grateful to the *sorcière* of Conques and her discarded spells.

Although in my case, I couldn't help but wish that the manuscript included a charm to reveal the rest of its secrets.



Notes

1. Several of his papers, including a folder of his typescript and research notes for his book *Anthologie de l'Occultisme* (1922), are also held at the Wellcome: WMS 2634-2637.

2. Anonymous, “Recueil de différents secrets avec leurs propriétés ensemble la manière de les faire et de s'en servir”, WMS 4171, Wellcome Library, London. The manuscript is 19 x 15 cm in size and has only 58 folios, the last eight of which are blank. The Wellcome Library acquired the manuscript in 1936. There is no pagination in the manuscript and no archivist has yet assigned it folio numbers, suggesting that it has not been examined in much detail.

3. Some of my tweets were storified. See Daniel Goldberg, “In the Archives: Recipes, Remedies & Spells in #HistMed: An historian of medicine works with an 18th c. spellbook. Awesome in so many ways...” (25 January 2013).

4. It might also derive from the verb “oser”, to dare.

5. These in turn were connected to times of year, astrological signs, specific ailments and the bodily humours. Wilson has a good overview of sympathetic magic: *Magical Universe*, pp. 349-350.

6. As Briggs puts it, anything that threatened members of the household or its resources was considered of paramount danger: *Witches and Neighbours*, p. 85.

7. Thomas, for example, uses anthropological studies to suggest that a person consulting a witch about theft would bring a list of potential thieves, the consultation would not be kept secret and the witch would ask questions around town. The guilty party might confess, be revealed, or return the missing property. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 216-221.

8. The “white skin” was either thrush or milk residue, both of which are common in newborns.

Showing His Monster

Susana H. Case

Lazarus Colloredo of Genoa
had a conjoined twin,
Monstrum novissimum,
a human Janus
hidden under his cloak,
whose torso, head and left leg
dangled from the belly

of the mobile Lazarus.
The sins of the mother,
seventeenth century belief—
parasitic hydrocephalic, flesh
and blood doppelgänger.
The twin never opened his eyes,
or closed his drooling halitosis.

Lazarus married, had children.
By all accounts, his wife
was happy, learned to love him.
Audiences paid to see and pinch
the twin, Joannes Baptista,
to hear him peep.
Showing made them rich.

They visited Paris,
the court of Charles the First.
In a bar, Lazarus killed
a teasing man, was reprieved
to save his innocent brother,
the echo, the contained
monster-twin of every man.



Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Water*, 1566, Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Austria (detail).
[Wikimedia Commons](#)



Photograph by Brian Schmidt. National Museum of Natural History, Division of Birds.

From the Aviary: *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

Amy Kohout

Today I pulled an eagle out of a drawer. There were three or four other eagles there, also female, but I was looking specifically for her. I recognized the handwriting on the tag, and turned it over for confirmation. Yes. She was lying on her back, neck extended, sharp claws crossed and secured. I carefully lifted her with two hands, and even though she is a skin—a shell, really, her organs and skeleton replaced with stuffing—I felt her weight.

I wasn't prepared for the eagle—for her size, for the impact that holding her in my hands would have on me. Historians talk about material culture, about the importance of engaging non-textual sources in our work and in our teaching, but, holding her, I was almost giddy. It was more than

that feeling that you're looking at the coolest, biggest, weirdest thing in the archive; when you require the white gloves, a bigger book cradle, a stand for viewing large format photographs. She had been alive once. And I felt something. Connected through the feeling of her feathers on my fingers, the proximity to something I'd only ever encountered at a safe distance.

I carried her to one of the work tables in the center of the collection space, and looked, really looked at her under the exam lights. *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*. The Bald Eagle.

She was as he'd described, though I hadn't been able to conjure an image from his details alone:

“Bill blackish...Legs + feet yellow ochre. Talons bluish black.” He listed her weight at nine pounds, two ounces on September 15, 1874. It was the week Edgar Alexander Mearns turned eighteen. He shot her near his home in Highland Falls, NY. It had been her home, too. Her feathers are brown; she hadn’t yet developed the iconic “bald” coloring of a mature bird. Mearns marked her juvenis, a juvenile specimen, not fully grown. The same could be said for Edgar, still in school, his future open, uncertain.

He did good work. This isn’t taxidermy; it’s scientific preparation. These birds are laid flat and preserved for future study, not mounted in life-like poses as art or decor. Even as a very young man, Mearns made skins as good or better than more experienced collectors before and after his time. The incision is neatly sewn and hidden beneath the feathers; the body is stable, anchored by a stick carefully positioned skull-to-tail inside. And, of course, she’s still here. The skins Edgar prepared as a teenager have long since survived him, and they do more than affirm his skill. They tell his story, a story I am following because of what it connects: nature and empire, West with East, life and work.

Mearns would rely on that precise stitching all his life. He went to medical school and joined the army. He took a commission as a surgeon at a post in the Arizona Territory, where he hoped to have opportunities to pursue his interest in the natural world. And the notes he made, the measurements he recorded, the specimens he skinned and prepared, these things he did in every place he served: they link Arizona and Minnesota out West with Luzon and Mindanao in the Philippines, forts in Rhode Island, Texas, Georgia, Virginia with the forests and meadows of Highland Falls. After twenty-five years of service, Mearns retired from the army but never from collecting. In 1909, he was one of three Smithsonian associates who accompanied Theodore and Kermit Roosevelt’s famed African Expedition. The artifacts of a life’s work: birds and mammals with small, steady sutures in their bellies, descriptions of animals observed and collected, lists and notes and letters; they are here, at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, in cabinets, drawers, and boxes.



The artifacts of a life’s work: birds and mammals with small, steady sutures in their bellies.”

Photograph by the author. National Museum of Natural History, Division of Birds.

My search revealed far more than this single bird. The collections are organized taxonomically; birds are grouped by genus and species, with specimens past and present mixed together, almost touching. The cabinet corridors of the Division of Birds are arranged according to Linnaean names. Imagine a card catalog in a code you never learned, or don’t remember. As a historian, I find this organization fascinating, and also slightly unsettling. Birds from different centuries, in this system, can lie side by side. This isn’t how historians tend to think about the passage of time. But I’m learning that attention to taxonomy doesn’t preclude an attention to chronology; it’s just a different chronology inside the cabinets, one based on ecological cycles rather than on forward motion. Many North American bird species are further sorted into males and females, adults and juveniles. And then they are grouped by month. The plumage of a bird collected in May might vary from a November specimen. Fall months more often produce young birds, battling the odds to survive until maturation. And perhaps most importantly, as migrants, always in motion, when the birds are in a particular place matters far more than which year it is.

I often feel like a migrant, following my work to wherever it takes me. Right now, I'm in DC. Soon, Ithaca, for the arrival of spring. After that, Chicago. And then, home again? If Ithaca can be called that, yes. I've lived there for five years, but I know I will not stay. My future home is uncertain. And this is how the birds help me. They live in motion. When it is time to move again, I think I will find this comforting. Maybe home doesn't need to be a place. Maybe having a cycle, a rhythm governing change, is enough.

I often feel like a migrant, following my work to wherever it takes me.

Did Mearns think this way? So many of his movements were beyond his control. The army ordered him around the West, and then around the world. They allowed him to spend his sick leave with his birds, organizing, studying, learning—but his papers contain letters that regret to inform him that additional leave time or museum assignments aren't possible; he simply cannot be spared. And so I wonder if bird-skinning was also home-making for Edgar Mearns, if this focus on birds seen, shot, and skinned everywhere—no matter where—might have been one of the ways he coped with the uncertainties in his life and work. Unable to choose where he would be, he followed birds everywhere.

And I've been following him: to Fort Verde, Arizona, last summer, and to the Museum of Natural History, where I stand considering this now flightless, lifeless bird on the collection table. I looked for her because of him, to understand his life, his work. But the more time I spend with this eagle (or my eagle, as I've begun to call her), the more I begin to wonder about her story. Did she migrate? Some eagles do, though their patterns of movement aren't as fixed as the routes traveled by other species. Immature eagles, in particular, wander quite a bit as they figure out how to hunt, soar, and survive through the winter. I think about



"Bill blackish... Legs + feet yellow ochre. Talons bluish black."
Photograph by Brian Schmidt. National Museum of Natural History, Division of Birds.

this, and realize the empathy I'm registering for this process of growth. And then I remember that she's dead, and has been for more than a century. She didn't mature, find a partner, reproduce. Instead, her death was part of Edgar's development—not just as a naturalist or a surgeon, but as a person. And now she's part of mine.



Acknowledgements:

Special thanks are in order for Christina Gebhard at the Division of Birds. When I asked, after a week spent looking at Mearns's papers in 2011, if we could look at one of his birds, I never imagined it would lead to a collaborative project and lessons in bird preparation! Christina offered thoughtful comments on a draft of this piece, and Brian Schmidt fielded lots of questions about birds and their collection, and in addition, kindly shared his photography skills (see his handiwork above). Thanks also to Josi Ward for generously reading, critiquing, and encouraging multiple drafts of this essay.

Mother Machine: an ‘Uncanny Valley’ in the Eighteenth Century

Brandy Schillace

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The eighteenth century was an age of mechanization, from Cartesian conceptions of animals as machines to nerve theory and early experiments in electricity. Mechanists argued that interaction among the body's parts, its “animal machinery,” was responsible “for all vital and mental processes.” Ingenious technicians constructed automata like Jacques Vaucanson's Flute Player, which debuted in 1738. A year later, the surgeon Claude-Nicolas Le Cat published a description of an “automaton man” in which “one sees executed the principle functions of the animal economy.”

Clearly, then, when Scottish man-midwife William Smellie unveiled his new teaching tool, this

“female machine” was among friends. There was, however, a crucial difference in the design. As I have noted elsewhere, these other devices and models demonstrated musculature for the viewer and so were the ‘main event.’ The mechanical woman, as a ‘mother,’ is instead operated by the physician. She had no head—and in consequence, no mind of her own. And yet, she brought forth little machines; she reproduced leather dolls with moving parts. She existed at the outer limits of reproduction, as both a curiosity and a piece of (uncanny) eighteenth-century high technology.

This curious machine was meant to answer the problem of the moment: how to provide sufficient



A late eighteenth-century “birthing phantom.” Unlike Smellie’s machine, these were not intended to be exactly like the living body, but rather a basic replica allowing midwives to understand the position of the child in the birth canal.

By permission of the Dittrick Medical History Center and Museum.

training for new (male) midwives—all goo of them—without further endangering living women? It created, however, more problems than it solved, and today it leaves us with more questions than answers. Despite its popularity, the machine disappears by 1780. Unlike the well-preserved plush birthing doll of French midwife Madame de Coudray, no extant copies of the Labour Device remain. Stranger still, there are no models, no sketches and no official descriptions as provided by the designer. What was it made of? How did it work? Why did it foster such vitriolic debates? The answer lies, in part, with the fragile, even permeable boundaries between matter and mind, body and being, *machine* and *mother*.

Finding oneself in an eighteenth-century medical theatre was an unsettling experience, one usually reserved for those who no longer needed the doctor's healing hands: the anatomy corpse. There were exceptions, however, such as the labor and delivery of pregnant women. Though the period saw the rise of notable practitioners of midwifery in Britain, including the 'Father of British Midwifery' William Smellie, women still died—and frequently. The greatest killer was puerperal fever, or septicemia, which they caught from the very doctors who delivered them Ignaz Semmelweis, the 'Father of Infection Control,' wasn't born until 1818). Statistics collected by Ruth Perry suggest that septicemia was "ten times as dangerous as venereal disease" (in an era when that was no small matter). Perry also reports on a number of "monster" birth cases, from the famous Mary Tofts case, who feigned giving birth to rabbits, to one about a dead infant being half-consumed by live snakes. These stories may speak of "helplessness and fear in the face of women's unpredictable and powerful reproductive capacities," but they also reflect an increasing desire to control female fecundity, shake off the horror of childbirth, and make the entire birthing process a workman-like affair. The unpredictable nature of the woman in labor and the mysteries of the womb led medical professionals to develop increasingly complex 'birthing' machines on which to practice and teach delivery.

In the seventeenth century, childbirth rituals were usually female, overseen by the midwife and various female friends, relatives and servants. In

the eighteenth century, however, male surgeons took over the bulk of the practice. This shift was not without controversy. Female midwives like Elizabeth Nihell lobbed vitriolic attacks at male midwives—and on the birthing machine's creator—for releasing "swarms" of male midwives into practice at the "expense of humanity" and decency. Already an experienced practitioner, Smellie studied the methods of French instructor Gregoire the Younger, but disappointment led him to develop new and better instruments (like augmented forceps) and a better way to practice their use: the Labour Device, or mechanical woman. Smellie wanted to use a device that would render the internal machinery of the female body distinct, while allowing his pupils to get a feel for delivery without endangering the living subject. The machine became the patient in the medical theater, one of the most unusual of the eighteenth century's collection of mechanical automations.*

* Mechanical automations of various sorts gained popularity in the eighteenth century as spectacle as well as science, from Jacques Vaucanson's 1738 "flute-player," a mechanical musician, to surgeon Claude-Nicolas Le Cat's proposed 'automation man,' a kind of phantom for demonstrating circulation. See Riskin, "Eighteenth-Century Wetware," *Representations* 83 (Summer 2003), pp. 97-125.

An apparent 'mechanical genius,' Smellie contrived devices that earned him the awe of his students and even of his detractors. One of Smellie's pupils writes:

[Dr. Smellie was] An uncommon Genius in all sorts of mechanicks, which after having shewed itself in many other Improvements he manifested in the machines which he has contrived for teaching the Art of Midwifery. Machines which Dr. Desaguliers, who frequently visited him, allowed to be infinitely preferable to all that he had ever seen of the same kind, and which I (from having seen those that are used at Paris) will aver to be by far the best that were ever invented.

This "apparatus" allowed Smellie to "perform and demonstrate all the different kinds of Delivery with more Deliberation, Perspicuity and Fulness than can be expected on real Subjects." It differed from other mechanical obstetrical devices, which were "no other than a piece of basket-work, containing a real pelvis covered with black leath-

er, upon which he could not clearly explain the difficulties that occur in turning children.” Being “little satisfied” with this method of instruction, Smellie resolved to create “machines which should so exactly imitate real women and children as to exhibit to the learner all the difficulties that happen in midwifery,” and he refers to his creative trials as his “labours”—a strange birth story in itself.

That Smellie was successful is evident from the notes of students and collections of advertisements—as well as from the attacks he weathered. In *A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery*, Nihell refers to the device as “his automaton or machine,”

[a wooden statue], representing a woman with child, whose belly was of leather, in which a bladder full, perhaps, of small beer, represented the uterus. This bladder was stopped with a cork, to which was fastened a string of packthread to tap it, occasionally, and demonstrate in a palpable manner the flowing of the red-colored waters. In short, in the middle of the bladder was a wax-doll, to which were given various positions.

From this benign and even laudatory presentation of the “ingenious piece of machinery,” Nihell proceeds to question its functionality. She asks if students can really learn an appreciation of the tender parts of a woman from a doll that does not feel, does not speak. What disturbs Elizabeth Nihell is not the mechanics, but the fact that it approximates the body so nearly, yet without sensation. Smellie’s greatest critics seem most appalled by the machine’s incredible approximation to the true body in labor. It is—to put it another way—too much like the real thing.

From student notes, we know that Smellie apparently added “ligaments, muscle and skin in artificial materials” to make the figure more life-like and, in the words of his pupils, to lay “every material circumstance [...] open to the naked Eye.” They were composed of real bones, covered with artificial ligaments and muscles and had the “Motion, Shape and Beauty of natural Bodies [...] with great Exactness.” Similar descriptions are to be found among advertisements, tucked into arguments of detractors, and in contemporary pamphlets; these are (unsurprisingly) quite difficult

to locate, and problematic biases make them even more difficult to judge. Johnstone collects the best and most reliable of these descriptions in his biography, including *A Short Comparative View of the Practice of Surgery in the French Hospitals*, which explain the mechanics: “The Uterus Externum and Internum [sic] are made to contract and dilate according to the Difficulty intended for the Delivery.”

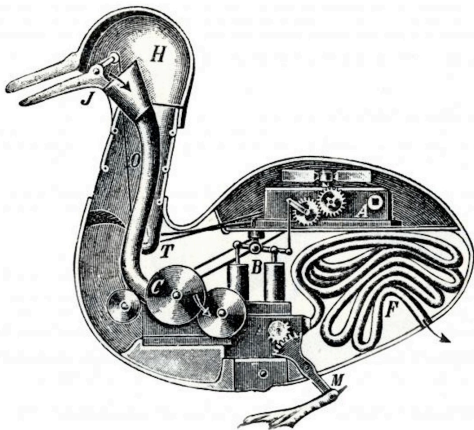
It is—to put it another way—too much like the real thing.

More mysterious yet is the extended description provided by surgeon Dr. Peter Camper. After attending Smellie’s lectures, he described the function of the machine as having abdominal and extra-abdominal muscles “made out of leather with such remarkable skill that not only is the structure as natural as possible but the necessary functions of parturition are performed by working models.” Camper described the “contraction of both the internal and external os, the generation of water in parturition and dilatation of the os uteri are so natural that hardly any difference is to be noticed between these, and those in natural women [my italics].” The fetuses are likewise described as imitating nature not only in size but in the natural movement of parts, of joints, and even of the moveable skull bones. These dolls were, says Camper, “excellently contrived, they having all the Motions of the Joints. Their Craniums are so formed as to give way to any Force exerted, and are so Elastic that the Pressure is no sooner taken off than they return to their natural Equalities.” Afterbirth was represented by “various leathers,” and the “change in the os tincae are noted and made clear by colours.” One of Smellie’s opponents—Douglas—claims that the machine also had “shoes, Stockings, and the common Apparel of Women.”

Such descriptions toy with the imagination: elastic, and yet mechanized; sinews laid open and yet fully clothed; hardly distinguishable from “natural” women, and yet headless and giving birth on the order of once an hour. It’s either high praise,

or a serious indictment of eighteenth-century patriarchy, which seems unperturbed by so monstrous and mindless a mother. But the mystery of its composition is worth considering further. India rubber was not readily available or understood until at least the mid-eighteenth century—and only recommended for medical use after 1768, when researchers Hérissant and Macquer recommended that it could be used for probes and tubes in laboratories. That Smellie constructed elastic, reforming craniums for his doll fetuses without it is, in itself, remarkable (and may explain why they are considered both more “natural”—that is, more lifelike—as well as strangely “unnatural”—that is, peculiar, odd, beyond comprehension). Was it a kind of stretched leather? Oiled or greased to keep it supple? Was it, like the French model of Mme. Coudray, made of cloth? Were there joints and hinges? And were they made of bone or metal and springs? How could the colored leather be described by a surgeon as “indistinguishable” from the real thing?

These are fair questions, but there is a better one: Why, if this machine was such a wonder, are there no illustrations of it? We know that Dr. William Hunter was in attendance at the auction and bought one of Dr. Smellie’s devices. Hunter himself did not illustrate the device, however, and later sold it to an old pupil of Smellie’s, Dr. Edward Foster. The machine travelled to Dublin, where it made a small debut, but demonstrations were cut short by Foster’s untimely death. After this, it disappeared.



An engraving of the *Canard Digérateur*, or “Digesting Duck” created by Jacques de Vaucanson in 1739.
Wikimedia Commons.

We can speculate about the political and cultural shifts that may have led to the device’s suppression in England (a backlash against devices and forceps in the latter part of the century). But this is true, in part, of other devices—and yet illustrations remain. A casual internet search for ‘obstetric phantom’ will yield French and Italian models from the Giovan Antonio Galli Obstetric Museum in Bologna to the surviving phantom of Madame du Coudray at the Musée Flaubert et d’histoire de la médecine in Rouen. Likewise, numerous automaton from the eighteenth century survive (the Musée du Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris, even has an image of the original mechanical defecating duck). Yet, though I have searched collections and even the market trade in medical artifacts, I can find no trace of either the mechanical mother or fetus. All that remains is the list catalog of artifacts auctioned off after Smellie’s death. The machines appear (amid other scientific preparations) as Lots 103-106:

103. No. 1. A Machine contrived for explaining all natural and easy Labours, and likewise difficult Labours, where difficulties arise from the Circumstances of the Child.

104. No. 2. Another Machine of the same Constructions, but so contrives as to explain the Difficulties which happen in Labours, from the Narrowness of the Bones of the Mother. In this Machine, besides the under part of the Uterus, &c. are represented the Great Vessels on the Vertebrae of the Loins, with the [...] Spermaties, and the Kidneys, all in the natural State.

103. No. 3. Another. This Machine is made with great Care, exhibiting not only the Uterus (which contracts and dilates) with all its Appendages, but all the different Bowels of the Abdomen.

106. No. 4. A new Machine finished (but not put together) by Dr. Smellie in the latter Part of his Life—The Uterus and its Appendages are so contrived as to be easily taken out and replaces by Lacing. This Machine the Dr. intended to be the most perfect, and, at the same Time, the most simple.

Lot 103, no. 1 of the catalogue describes the first (ten-year-old) machine; it still appears to be in order but, given its age, it was likely in a state of some disrepair. Lot 104, no. 2 was specifically used for showing cases of “narrowness of bones” in the mother. Rickets were a common problem,

often resulting in difficult or impossible labor due to the misshapen pelvic bones; it is possible that this device was meant to demonstrate problems of this nature. The third machine features a “contracting” uterus. The final machine, no. 4, was supposedly the most advanced and, as the last completed before Smellie’s death, entirely new. Whether all of these were purchased by Hunter and then Foster, or whether they were separated, whittled away and dispersed, we cannot now know. The last trick of the mechanical mother, it seems, was a disappearing act.



As a medical humanist scholar of reproduction, I am fascinated by this strange machine and its disappearance. How could so unusual an automaton fade out of record? I searched for the machine for nearly three years, visiting three countries, two private collections, and one very knowledgeable gynecologist (with his own private museum). I have been to various exhibitions and collections, spent long hours under incandescent lights in the bowels of old libraries and equally long stretches skimming through digitized collections. But for a long time, I had simply to admit defeat; I had been unable to locate the remains, the resting place, the conclusion of this strange story. And of course many an archeological search ends just this way: many hours spent sifting sand to find... only to find more sand. But a recent trip to the Harvard Museum of Natural History offered a ray of hope. No, I did not discover the mechanical woman, laboring on in a dusty corner. (Would that it were so!)

What I found instead were three-thousand glass flowers.

Created by artisans Leopold and Rudolph Blaschka between 1887 and 1936, the delicate beauties had been commissioned by Professor George Lincoln Goodale, founder of the Botanical Museum, for teaching botany. The results are astounding—and deceptive. The glass flowers look so real, that they do not appear to be glass at all. Of course, knowing they are not live specimens, my twenty-first century perception assumed them to be plastic, pretty but mass produced. I was terribly wrong, and my crude assumption flew in the face of the craftsmanship that clearly went into each painstaking stem and petal. But this realization led to another—should any of these treasures be removed from their hallowed space, tucked away in a back room to be found by those who knew nothing of their history, wouldn’t they be haplessly abandoned or discarded? There would be no need to render them in sketches (and I took no photos). Why bother? They are not novelties; they look just like flowers. And so, if Smellie’s ingenuity and talent ultimately resulted in a machine so like the human body that it seemed (to some) indistinguishable from it, would there have been an impetus to render it among his students? Would an anatomy (like those presented in Smellie’s treatises) do just as well? And, when discovered by the grieving widow of Dr. Foster, in a country and at a time when its previous fame was unknown, would it have been deemed worth keeping? A strange headless doll in stocking feet? Perhaps not, after all.



Glass flowers created by Leopold and Rudolph Blaschka, today housed at the Harvard Museum of Natural History.
Flickr user Lostinfog.

The machine-mother existed as an eighteenth-century “uncanny valley,” a term coined by robotics professor Masahiro Mori to describe the disruption felt when an “animated character becomes almost indistinguishable from a human” and “small deviations [...] begin to unsettle the viewer.” The latter part of the eighteenth century saw the rise of the man-midwife, his future more or less assured, but the obstetric machine fell into obscurity. To midwives like Nihell, the mechanical woman was a monstrosity, but perhaps—unlike the other automatons of its time—it was not quite monstrous *enough*. A curiosity enthralls only at the interstices.

Inexplicable, mysterious and extraordinary, Smellie’s invention may have done more to vivify the machine than to mechanize birth—but a mechanical woman only fascinates where machine and body meet, like Frankenstein’s monster with the stitches still showing. If, as both students and detractors claim, it was too near the mark, too like the real thing, its very ingenuity may have thwarted its own legacy. Thus, despite the ‘labour’ of midwifery’s founding father, the doctor and his monstrous machine—repellent rather than attractive in its anthropomorphization—left no progeny.



Author’s Note:

An early version of this paper was presented as “The Curious Disappearance of the Mechanical Mother,” UCD Irish Centre for Nursing & Midwifery History Spring—Summer Seminar Series, 2011 and as “The Father of British Midwifery and the Mother of Inventions,” Centre for the History of Science, Technology & Medicine CHSTM Seminar Series, 2011.



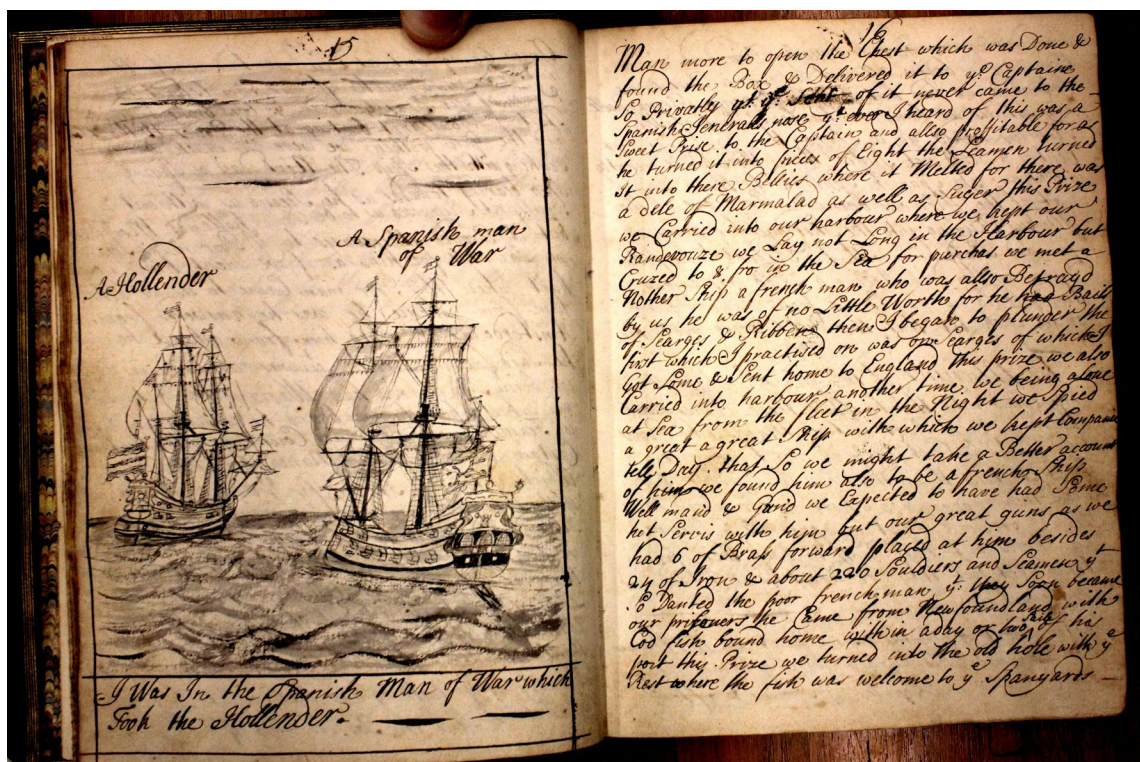
The Many Lives of Ned Coxere: Were British Sailors Really British?

Alexis Harasemovitch Truax

The Spanish Man-of-War is bearing down on the English merchant ship and Ned is in the cabin, stuffing Barbary Ducats into his hat and shoes. After escaping from Spanish captivity, the English Navy's press gang, and slavery in North Africa, Ned Coxere is no stranger to hardship—or to getting out of sticky situations. After he was ransomed from Barbary slavery in 1658, this resourceful polyglot landed a spot aboard an English merchant vessel. The captain, Peter Merit, hired Ned (with his fluent Dutch and worldly demeanor), to play the part of a Dutch merchant—going ashore in a small boat with four or five Dutch sailors in order to trade with the Spanish, with whom England was at war. The ruse was so meticulous that, as Ned tells it in his narrative of his adventures at sea, “they had writings all made in Dutch my

name was to be Peter Johnson of Amsterdam and had close [Ed. note—“clothes”] fitted after the Dutch fashion.”

Ned and the English merchant ship had planned to sail for the Canary Islands “Richly Laden with Bees wax, sheld almonds, goats skins, with a quantity of pieces of eight and Barbary gold,” but instead, they are under fire from the Spanish. Outnumbered and outgunned by the warship, the crew can see their ultimate fate, and Ned is pocketing loot before being taken prisoner. When the Spanish finally board, they fall “aplundering, pulling off[f] our mens close from of[f] there Backs.” Ned, however, dressed only in his hat, shoes and shirt, avoids their notice.



Library of Congress.

Then the unexpected happens. Humphrey Mantle, a sailor from Ned's hometown of Dover comes aboard with the Spanish and immediately recognizes Ned. Humphrey had been taken prisoner by the crew and "for his Liberty Entered himself as one of there Company & Fought against us so came aboard to plunder." Ned promises Humphrey half of the Ducats he had secreted away, if Humphrey will take the coins and hide them. He agrees, and an instant later Ned is carried on board the Man-of-War where as he later recounts, "these spanyards were so Greedy for Gold that they striped us into our shirts & felt behind my Ears." Ned and his crew are then thrown into the cold and stinking hold. How would Ned escape?

By employing that old familiar scheme of his: impersonation.



Ned's life as a linguist, adventurer, and master impersonator began at fifteen, when his parents sent him to France so that he could learn the language and prepare for a life of global commerce. His early introduction to French was followed by Dutch,

picked up while working aboard a Dutch merchant ship, and Spanish, which he learned when the Dutch ship was sold to the Spanish Navy. He could also speak the Mediterranean Lingua Franca—a pidgin language that combined various Italian dialects, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese—which he learned during his time as a slave at Ghar El Melhn in Tunisia. This talent for language allowed him to move through the Mediterranean with ease. In a dangerous seventeenth-century era of warring states, marauding ships, and so many obstacles to trade and personal liberty, it was his passport.

Ned Coxere and his fellow sailors inhabited a world plagued by nearly constant warfare. Between his birth in 1633 and his death in 1694, England was continuously involved in conflicts with a succession of other powerful states: Spain, France, and Holland. English ships were also often under threat from North African privateers. And while kings, emperors, and oligarchs waged war, their subjects made do. Some captains took advantage of these circumstances by obtaining a letter of marque, which was a government license to plunder enemy ships. Others resorted to trick-

"The ships themselves often pick up such queer castaway creatures found tossing about the open sea on planks, bits of wreck, oars, whaleboats, canoes, blown-off Japanese junks, and what not."

ery and deception to avoid conflict. Ships often flew colors of neutral states to prevent attack by their enemies. And many sailors, like Ned and his boatful of Dutch seamen, impersonated men of other nations to facilitate trade.

Sailors were able to fake their national identity due to the cosmopolitan nature of maritime life: they were used to working under various flags and among diverse cultures and languages. Sailors like Ned worked with men who came from every corner of the globe: not only from all of the British Isles and Europe, but also from the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Eager to limit the multitude of nationalities aboard their merchant vessels, the English government would pass the Navigation

Act of 1660, which required that three out of four seamen on English ships be subjects of the crown. Even after the passage of these acts, the state itself admitted that in times of war more than half of many crews were not English. Collected from ports all over the globe, these crews could be a ragtag bunch. "Such unaccountable odds and ends of strange nations come up from the unknown nooks and ash-holes of the earth to man these floating outlaws," Herman Melville wrote of whalers in the nineteenth century. "The ships themselves often pick up such queer castaway creatures found tossing about the open sea on planks, bits of wreck, oars, whaleboats, canoes, blown-off Japanese junks, and what not."



Work aboard merchant ships provided mariners like Ned with shorter voyages and better wages than the Navy, where conditions were terrible and pay was low. Merchant ships also offered better opportunities for prosperity in the form of “venture”—a personal stock of goods individual sailors could bring aboard in hopes of making their own profits. But merchant ships didn’t free sailors from the threat of war, violence, and captivity—it made them more exposed to the threat of attack by privateers. And when a voyage went bad, as Ned’s just has, deception was often the only way out.

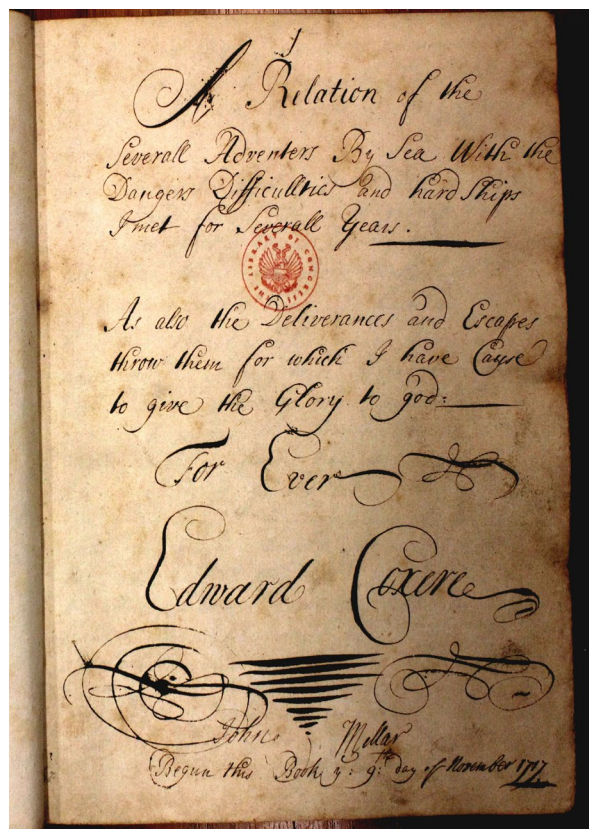


Down in the reeking hold of the Spanish Man-of-War, Ned and his crew are miserable. They are given little water, and that they do have is fetid. But the thought of his gold Ducats revives his spirits. It means that he will not starve once he is sent ashore to prison. When they arrive in Cadiz, however, he learns that his friend Humphrey has run away aboard a ship bound for Holland. Desperate at the thought of rotting in Spain, Ned begins to plan his escape. “My next work was to put all the Ingenuity I had at work how to Cheat the Prowd spanyards of a Prisoner the second time,” Ned recalls.

Put to work above decks on the Spanish Man-of-War, Ned falls into conversation with one of Humphrey’s friends. When Ned tells his story, the friend takes pity on him, giving him a piece of eight. Ned hopes to use it to get aboard a Dutch ship that is anchored in the bay close by. Ned bides his time. A Spanish boatman comes aboard to sell wine, and Ned sees his opportunity. Ned does his best to blend in with the Spanish crew. With his fluent Spanish, he succeeds. He offers the boatman a quarter of his piece of eight for passage to the Dutch ship. The boatman, thinking Ned is a subject of Spain, and not an English prisoner, agrees. When they reach the Dutch ship, Ned pays the boatman, who

“went about his Busines, not knowing he had cheated the King of a prisoner.”

Being abandoned by his friend and robbed of his Ducats would only wound Ned temporarily. As much as he was a sailor of the world, he was also a Dover man, and those bonds of trust and obligation were still strong. Eventually, Humphrey gave half of the Ducats to Ned’s wife. Safe and sound back in Dover, Humphrey could not risk damaging his reputation by withholding Ned’s share. These were home ties worth defending. Like Ned, seamen often married women from their hometowns, and returned there after a life at sea. Ned’s wife, Mary, like many mariners’ wives, managed her husband’s affairs when he was away, often selling cloth and other goods he had brought from abroad. Some sailors even gave power of attorney to women in their families. This allowed the women to collect wages, make property transactions, and appear in court to do business in their kin’s name. Having absent husbands thus gave wives like Mary more independence



Cover for an eighteenth-century copy of Edward Coxere’s narrative. Library of Congress.

than many other women of their day, and they participated in the same trade and trust networks as their husbands. These networks helped reinforce the importance of homeport reputation, even in the mobile world of sailors.

Yet just as important were the bonds made at sea. Historian Marcus Rediker argues that isolation from traditional social structures such as family and church allowed sailors to create a “community apart”: their need for collective safety in the face of dangerous working conditions strengthened their solidarity. Britons had long described sailors as a “nation apart”: tanned, tattooed and with strange clothing and customs, British sailors seemed “a generation differing from all the world.” Sailors from across the globe could be bound together by shared sufferings and experiences at sea as well as by their marginalization from larger society at home. Adding to this sailors’ solidarity, Ned’s linguistic skills not only allowed him to fake his nationality, but also to create connections. His ability to move between cultures helped him to bond with sailors from different nations and encouraged a wide variety of sailors to sympathize with his plight. Perhaps after years at sea he and his fellow sailors had more in common with their brethren aboard than with their own countrymen.

To what extent then, could Ned—fluent in Dutch, French, and Spanish and living a sailor’s life since the age of fifteen—be considered an Englishman?



Once aboard the Dutch ship, Ned fell in with the steersman who, as Ned puts it “seemed to have pity on me I having the Languidge it took the more with him to plead with the skipper to keep me on board.” Dutch was not only a means of communication, but also a shared cultural connection. The steersman saw Ned as a compatriot, and thus someone who, like himself, deserved pity. And when the skipper finally agreed to let him on board, Ned found that the crew was half French. Once again, Ned recalls, “I having the French tongue got into favour with them.” Ned wasn’t just impersonating men of other nations; these were real cultural transformations that added to his bag of escape tricks, and then transcended them.

He could be anyone and go anywhere. Almost.

After a short time aboard the Dutch ship, Ned got passage to Faro, Portugal where he heard of two English vessels “sixteen miles from thence at a place called Tavira.” When he was set ashore, however, he and his friends found themselves alone on a deserted island. On the beach, they looked out at the empty sea. How would Ned escape this, his latest imprisonment?

“We stood gaseing & knew not what to do.”



Notes

1. Ducats were gold coins used throughout Europe from the thirteenth century until the First World War. By the seventeenth century they were a major global currency. Although minted by different states in Europe and the Mediterranean, Ducats were known for their reasonably consistent weight and gold content. Barbary Ducats, however, were notorious for containing less gold than Ducats minted in other places. See Shepard Pond, “The Ducat: Once an Important Coin in European Business,” *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 14 no. 2 (April 1, 1940): 17-19. The term “Barbary” derives from the Berber peoples of North Africa. In the seventeenth century, “Barbary Coast” or “Barbary States” referred to the North African states of Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli. Morocco was fully independent while the other states were semi-autonomous parts of the Ottoman Empire ruled by a Dey a Bey and a Pasha respectively. For a comprehensive discussion of relations between England and the Barbary States in this period, see Nabil Matar, *Britain and Barbary, 1589-1689* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

The English Press Gang were agents of the Royal Navy who in times of war operated to (often violently) recruit sailors to man English warships. Maritime communities sometimes came to the aid of their impressed neighbors and relatives causing violent affrays and press riots. Ned, in usual form, escaped the press gang by disguising himself as a Dutch merchant. For more on Naval impressment see Nicholas Rogers, *Press Gang: Naval Impressment*

and Its Opponents in Georgian Britain (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2008).

The following narrative and quotations are drawn from the sailor's memoir. This article references an early eighteenth-century copy of Ned's narrative "transcribed by John Millar 1717-18." Edward Coxere, *Narrative of Edward Coxere, 1647-1684*, Library of Congress Manuscript Division Washington, D.C. In 1945, rare book dealer and poet E. H. W. Meyerstein published an edited edition of Ned's original 1658 manuscript. See E. H. W. Meyerstein, ed., *Adventures by Sea of Edward Coxere* (London: Clarendon Press, 1945).

2. "Pieces of eight" was the colloquial name for a Spanish Dollar, which was another of the first global currencies. A Spanish Dollar or "Peso" was worth eight Reales and could be physically cut into eight pieces to make change and creating "pieces of eight."

3. From the sixteenth century, North African privateers or "Barbary Corsairs" attacked European merchant ships, plundering the vessels and taking the sailors as slaves. Nations who made treaties and paid tribute to the Barbary States were issued Mediterranean passes, which secured a ship against attack. One way to escape from slavery was to convert to Islam. Indeed Ned's ship was captured by an English "Renegade," a captain who had "turned Turk"—that is converted to Islam and become a corsair. For more on English slaves in North Africa see Part I of Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600-1850* (Norwell, MA: Anchor, 2004). The Barbary captivity narrative became a popular genre in this period, of which Ned's adventures is a prime example. For a collection of captivity narratives see *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).



Spectral Passages

Douglas Hunter

I. Into the Ice

On June 19, 1606, John Knight ran out of options.

Several days of jousting with contrary winds, waves and shifting ice floes in the Labrador Sea in his little ship, the *Hopewell*, had forced him onto the Labrador shore, somewhere north of present-day Nain. Anchored in an uncharted bay, the *Hopewell* was soon battered by ice. The hull was holed, the rudder unshipped. Only by

settling on the bottom, her hold filling with water, did the *Hopewell* not actually sink altogether.

The single-ship *Hopewell* expedition was the first English effort to investigate a possible Northwest Passage to Asia since George Waymouth's *Discovery* voyage of 1602. Waymouth claimed to have sailed 100 leagues—some 300 nautical miles—beyond the tide-ripped entrance to a strait between northern Labrador and Baffin Island that John Davis in his 1587

voyage journal had described as “a mighty overfal, and roing, and with divers circular motions like whirlepooles, in such sort as forcible streames passe thorow the arches of bridges.” This entrance became known as the Furious Overfall. Knight had fallen short of gaining it by about 250 nautical miles, and was in danger of losing both ship and crew.

On June 25 Knight sent a party out in the ship’s boat under command of his mate, Edward Gorrell, to see if there was a safer anchorage at an island about a mile away, where he could move the Hopewell for further repairs—provided he could first refloat her. But the ice was so thick that Gorrell could make no headway. The next morning, Knight wrote “Thursday the 26, beinge faire wether,” and that was all. He paused in the midst of writing and decided to investigate the nearby island himself. He assembled a party consisting of Gorrell, his own brother Gabriel, and three other men. In addition to navigational instruments, Knight took along an arsenal of weapons: four pistols, three muskets, five swords and two half pikes.

The ice pack had eased enough to allow Knight’s party to reach the island at ten o’clock in the morning. He ordered a trumpeter and another crewmember named Oliver Browne to remain with the boat while he led the rest on a reconnaissance.

Knight and his companions walked over the island’s rise and vanished without a sound.



II. Boatman of the Underworld

Northern European mariners were determined to prove a route to the riches of eastern Asia that was shorter than the proven one around Africa, and the history of their search for a northern passage to Asia is full of disappearances. The vanishing of John Knight and his three companions is one of the less celebrated, overshadowed by the destruction of the Franklin expedition’s *Erebus* and *Terror* and their entire crews in the late 1840s.

Yet Knight’s loss remains compelling as part of a chain of disappearances and appearances. Some

northern passage seekers seemed to disappear and yet somehow did not, their lives refloating, like the *Hopewell*, to sail again.

The best explanation for the disappearance of John Knight’s party was that they were surprised by a group of Inuit, who abducted or killed them before the Englishmen could fire a single volley. Soon after Knight failed to return to the ship’s boat, the *Hopewell* was attacked by a group of “very little people, tawnie coloured, thin or no bear[d], and flat nosed,” that was repelled with musket fire. The ten remaining crewmembers managed to refloat the ship and limp to a fishing station at Fogo Bay in Newfoundland, where the *Hopewell* was rendered sufficiently shipshape to return to England. There, the *Hopewell* was placed in the hands of a new name in polar passage-seeking: Henry Hudson.

Nothing is known about Hudson’s nautical career before that moment. He effectively stepped into the historical record when John Knight took his leave of it, and he used Knight’s *Hopewell* on two northern voyages. The first, in 1607, attempted and failed to scout a route to Asia directly over the North Pole. The second, in 1608, attempted and failed to prove a route to Asia by the Northeast Passage, over the top of Russia. On a quixotic third voyage in the employ of the Dutch East India Company, Hudson defied his sailing instructions. After again failing to prove the Northeast Passage, the task for which he had been hired, he took the ship all the way to eastern North America, where he became the first European known to have explored the river that now bears his name.

For his fourth voyage, Hudson was back in the employ of English interests, and they gave him the *Discovery*, which was most likely the same *Discovery* used by George Weymouth in 1602. They sent him back to complete the task that John Knight could not, resuming Weymouth’s investigations beyond the Furious Overfall. He was even given Weymouth’s mate, William Cobreth. Hudson ditched him before clearing the Thames and replaced him with a favourite, Robert Juet. That set the stage for Hudson’s own vanishing, cast away in a ship’s boat in James Bay with his son and seven other luckless men by mutineers—whose ringleaders included Juet—in June 1611.

Long before Hudson was dispatched to his unknowable fate, the *Hopewell*, then Knight's ship, lay dashed on the Labrador shore in 1606. The pen that John Knight had set down after writing the word *weather* was next taken up by Oliver Browne, one of the two men he had left behind in the ship's boat as he and his companions marched over the island's rise into whatever otherness consumed them. Browne completed the account of the voyage and answered to the investors when the *Hopewell* finally regained England. There was good reason to suspect that Knight might have been abandoned by a crew who were tired of the fearful struggle to reach the Furious Overfall and only wanted to go home.

The truth as to Knight's disappearance is a mystery that haunts any researcher—but his immediate successor's identity is just as puzzling. I could learn nothing about Oliver Browne's existence, before or after that voyage, as I researched my book *God's Mercies*. But I was nagged by the fact that, as Clements R. Markham noted of Samuel Purchas's account of the Knight expedition in *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625), "There is a mark like the beginning of an l, followed by the e in Browne..." Purchas's rendering of his name as something like Brownle was terribly close to Oliver Brownel, which was how the English rendered the name Olivier Brunel, a Fleming who made several attempts to prove the Northeast Passage route to Asia. Word was that Brunel had drowned in 1585 on the coast of northern Russia when his ship's boat capsized. That may well have been the case. But who was this Oliver Browne, who had left Knight behind on that island, never attempting to look for him, and had then guided the *Hopewell* home?

Was Oliver Browne in fact Oliver Brownel, who was in fact Olivier Brunel? If so, Brunel first would have made himself disappear, to avoid unhappy backers when his last voyage ended in failure and financial loss. He would have then placed himself and his rare expertise in high-latitude sailing at the service of English merchant adventurers, who assigned him to



the Knight expedition. It thus became Brunel/Brownel/Browne's misfortune (or opportunity) to usher John Knight and his companions out of existence.

There is yet another way to envision Oliver Browne: as a spectral figure, a boatman of the underworld. Brunel, who had drowned when his ship's boat capsized, had emerged from his watery grave to row Knight to his own demise. He then linked Knight to Hudson via the resurrected *Hopewell*—a ship raised from a watery grave, just as Brunel was—before disappearing again. And Hudson, just like Knight, would go to an unknown grave.



III. Strangeness Visible

The history of Arctic exploration is full of cul de sacs, of narrow channels in ice fields, of straits that turn out to be bays, and of illusions that appeared to be opportunities. Some adventurers hesitated and missed breakthroughs of discovery. Others rushed in and found their retreats cut off by enclosing pack ice that ground their ships to flinders. Islands also appeared where none existed: cloudbanks and enormous ice fields masqueraded as solid ground. People saw things that were not there—or that we insist could never have been there.

Writing the history of arctic exploration involves its own mirages.

Writing the history of Arctic exploration involves its own mirages. As historians, we mirror the anxieties of our subjects in where we choose to steer our own research. Possibilities tantalize, and one either pencils cautious question marks on the chart or follows them, hoping they lead somewhere. It can be a disorienting field in which to work, especially where the early voyages are concerned. Evidence is thin, and the smallest clues (a

single name, a few words in a journal), can open grand vistas—or at least promise to do so.

Sometimes, as in the case of a riddle like Brunel/Brownel/Browne, you embrace caution as the better part of valor. I never wrote about who Browne might have been, whether living or dead, natural or supernatural, in *God's Mercies*. That was an opening in the ice field I would not permit myself to probe, a lonely figure on a hilltop ridge whose beckoning I declined to follow.

But we nevertheless should recognize how metaphor can organize fact without doing violence to rationalism. With our Arctic passage makers, ideas of transformation, of appearance and disappearance, of replication, resonate. And there are openings in these intertwined stories that do need to be entered.

In the search for a northern passage to Cathay and the Indies that began in the late sixteenth century and proceeded in fits and starts for several hundred years, voyages replicated previous ones in part because observations were so unreliable. Confirmation demanded repetition, and the limited supply of seafarers with sufficient skill and daring lived out versions of past lives. They were given the ships of previous adventurers, sometimes some of their crew, and they took hold of their predecessors' journals, logs and charts in hope of experiencing and thus affirming what those predecessors had. Sometimes they re-experienced more than they bargained for, and they also perpetuated their delusions.

Although their methodology was rational, they sailed from and into a world that cannot always be bent to satisfy our own rationality. There may not be room in conventional history for Olivier Brunel/Oliver Browne as a boatman of the underworld, but I doubt that the sixteenth-century polymath John Dee, who did more than anyone in the court of Elizabeth I to advance the scientific search for a northern passage to 'the Indies,' would give this much argument. Dee consulted archangels via a crystal sphere. James VI of Scotland, who ascended the English throne as James I in 1603, wrote a learned treatise on witches. Brunel as Arctic specter may not have given either Dee or James much pause.

Moreover, the seas these expeditions sailed teemed with strangeness. George Waymouth's description of the Furious Overfall verged on hallucinatory: the water, he said, was black, different from the blue of the rest of the ocean, and flowed "thicke as puddle [pudding]." Henry Hudson confidently reported on his second voyage in the *Hopewell* that his crew spotted a pair of mermaids. Of one, Hudson wrote:

from the navill upward, her backe and breasts were like a woman's, as they say that saw her; her body as big as one of us; her skin very white; and long haire hanging down behinde, of colour blacke; in her going downe they saw her tayle, which was like the tayle of a porposse, and speckled like a macrell.

It's no use trying to communicate across the centuries and tell Hudson and his men that they actually saw seals or walruses. They knew perfectly well what those were. They would laugh us straight back into the hyper-rational future for doubting their mermaids.

The geography of their passage search was a tangle of false sightings, mistaken identity, and cartographic creativity. In the estimation of Martin Frobisher, who came to eastern Baffin Island in the late 1570s to mine fruitlessly for precious metal, what John Davis would call the Furious Overfall was a dead end. Frobisher's cartography further compounded the confusion by arguing that the bay at the eastern end of Baffin Island was a strait. So confusing was the late sixteenth-century perception of the eastern Arctic of North America that Davis didn't realize he was at Frobisher Bay when he traversed its mouth in 1587, and instead named it Lumley's Inlet. When England's leading cartographic minds helped mathematician Emery Molyneux create the country's first terrestrial globe (actually a pair) in 1592, they were sufficiently mystified by these conflicting bays and straits that they located Frobisher Strait 600 miles to the east, bisecting Greenland—an interpretation further codified by Edward Wright in his world map of 1599.

Henry Hudson went looking for the entrance to Frobisher Strait on the east coast of Greenland on his fourth and final voyage. He showed every con-

fidence he was in its vicinity when he remarked in his journal on June 9, 1610 that "we were off Frobishers Streights." Already Hudson had tried to find Busse Island along latitude 57 North, west of Ireland, which the crew of one of Frobisher's ships, the *Busse of Bridgewater*, insisted on having sighted in 1578. The nonexistent landfall was so tenaciously affixed to charts that the British Admiralty would downgrade it to a submerged seamount before giving up on it altogether in the nineteenth century. Earlier on the same passage home, the *Busse's* crew reported seeing Friesland, an enormous island south of Greenland that existed only in the fourteenth-century fantasies of the Zeno brothers of Venice, thus helping ensure that their fictions continued to clutter sea charts into Hudson's time. Hudson also reported sailing along the coast of Desolation, an island John Davis placed on the west side of Greenland that may have been a vast field of sea ice when Davis noted it.

The topography of the passage search was complicated by the limited accuracy of navigation instruments and a highly imperfect understanding of the compass's workings. Many navigators in Hudson's time understood there was a difference between magnetic north—the direction to the north magnetic pole, at which the compass needle pointed—and geographic north—the direction to the north geographic pole, which marked the earth's rotational axis and was key to the scheme of latitude and longitude. But they didn't know why. Hudson's right-hand-man, Robert Juet, adhered to the idea William Gilbert proposed in *De Magnete* in 1600 that there was no such thing as a magnetic pole, that observed directional differences were localized and due to changes in the height of the earth such as mountains and ocean depths. No one even realized until the 1630s that the magnetic pole's location wandered over time.

Approaching the Furious Overfall, the difference in bearing between the magnetic and geographic poles neared and then rapidly exceeded twenty degrees, a profound challenge to anyone trying both to find their way and to compare what they saw with what their predecessors had recorded.

In 1610 Henry Hudson nevertheless entered the strait beyond the Furious Overfall that now bears

his name. He sailed some 300 miles west over the course of a difficult month, before encountering a vast expanse of water to the south. He steered into it, for reasons he never explained or any crewmember understood.

I believe he was looking for a passage Edward Wright had affixed to his 1599 map that was supposed to lead from such a deep bay to a proto-concept of the Great Lakes, called Lake Tadouac. That lake in turn was connected by the St. Lawrence River to the Atlantic Ocean, in Wright's assessment. But in late 1603 or early 1604 the French explorer Samuel de Champlain had argued in his book *Des Sauvages* that the St. Lawrence drained a series of lakes that were connected by a passage to the Pacific Ocean. Champlain's book assuredly was known in England. Henry Hudson probably hoped that a passage promised by Wright leading south from what we now call Hudson Bay and James Bay would, via the group of lakes Champlain posited, connect with the passage to the Pacific that Champlain further assured his readers existed.

Hudson's gamble led him into the greatest cul de sac of any passage venture. He was trapped physically, forced to spend a winter in a corner of James Bay at the south end of Hudson Bay. But he was also isolated psychologically, incapable of confiding in any of his crew what had led him to this point. Even after Hudson agreed in June 1611 to take the *Discovery* home, enough of the crew decided to seize command, and to consign Hudson and his companions to their unknowable fate.

Mutiny was part of the *Discovery*'s past. George Waymouth had experienced one on her deck in 1602, as everyone from the master's mate to the supercargo refused to follow him any further in his adventures beyond the Furious Overfall. Waymouth's life, however, was spared. The mutineers aboard the *Discovery* in 1611 were infinitely less generous, as they staged a reenactment

not of Waymouth's bloodless overthrow but rather of another insurrection that had occurred far to the south, at the Virginia colony of Jamestown, in September 1607. That uprising had involved Hudson's own friend, Captain John Smith, and it overthrew the command of Sir Edward Maria Wingfield.*

The record of the Hudson mutiny, in particular the depositions by the survivors—only eight of the original crew of twenty-three made it home—reveals a fascinating episode of repetition. This had nothing to do with confirming the location of a particular bay or an unresolved strait. Instead, the mutineers made every effort to shape the insurrection around a legally defensible precedent. The ringleaders must have been aware of the details of the notorious Wingfield episode. As no one was ever punished for Wingfield's overthrow, and as Hudson's voyage shared many leading investors with the Virginia colony, the mutineers did their best to mimic it. The same charges (doubtful in Hudson's case) that were hurled against Wingfield—of hoarding food while others starved, and playing favorites—were trotted out. Just as mutineers had placed Wingfield in a vessel in the river James while they searched his lodgings for evidence, so Hudson and his associates were persuaded to take to the ship's boat while the same search was made of Hudson's cabin aboard the *Discovery*.

But where Wingfield was allowed back ashore and ultimately returned safely to England, Hudson received no such mercy. The search for evidence hadn't even begun when the tow-rope was cut, and Hudson and his eight companions were left astern as the *Discovery*'s sails unfurled. The repeatable became the unimaginable.



* These early voyages of exploration were privately funded ventures, and the "supercargo" was aboard as the investors' representative. A ship was commanded by a master (not a captain), and his second-in-command was the master's mate. Often this is shortened informally to "mate" but that can cause confusion with the boatswain's mate. Some voyages had a designated pilot, who was in charge of navigation, although his job was sometimes filled by the master or the master's mate. Other senior crew positions above the ranks of common sailors were the boatswain (who was generally in charge of the equipment and perhaps the crew as well), the carpenter, and the cook. A barber-surgeon might also be along. Young gentlemen adventures often rounded out these ship's companies.

4. Moving Mountains

Replication and delusion did not end with Henry Hudson. In 1818, John Ross guided a two-ship British Admiralty expedition into Lancaster Sound on the north side of Baffin Island. The search for a Northwest Passage was being reinvigorated; Ross had set out to probe for a passage entrance and survey Baffin Bay, described by William Baffin in 1616. As his partner Baffin had a Hudson crew member, Robert Bylot, whose complicity in the 1611 mutiny remains unresolved but suspicious.

What little survived from that remarkably intrepid 1616 Baffin voyage—a journal version that may not be infallible, a second-hand map—had led some early nineteenth-century critics to question Baffin's honesty and navigation skills. John Ross was conscious of his role in an act of replication and restoration. With his own explorations, Ross was affirming Baffin's reliability and skill. This came to a head at Lancaster Sound, so named by Baffin in July 1616. Baffin had not devoted any time to investigating the sound, concluding that it was another hopeless Arctic cul de sac in the search for a Northwest Passage. "How many of the best sort of men haue set their whole endeaouours to prooue a passage that wayes?" Baffin lamented to a backer, Sir John Wolstenholme, on his return. It was Baffin's last Arctic voyage, and with the pas-

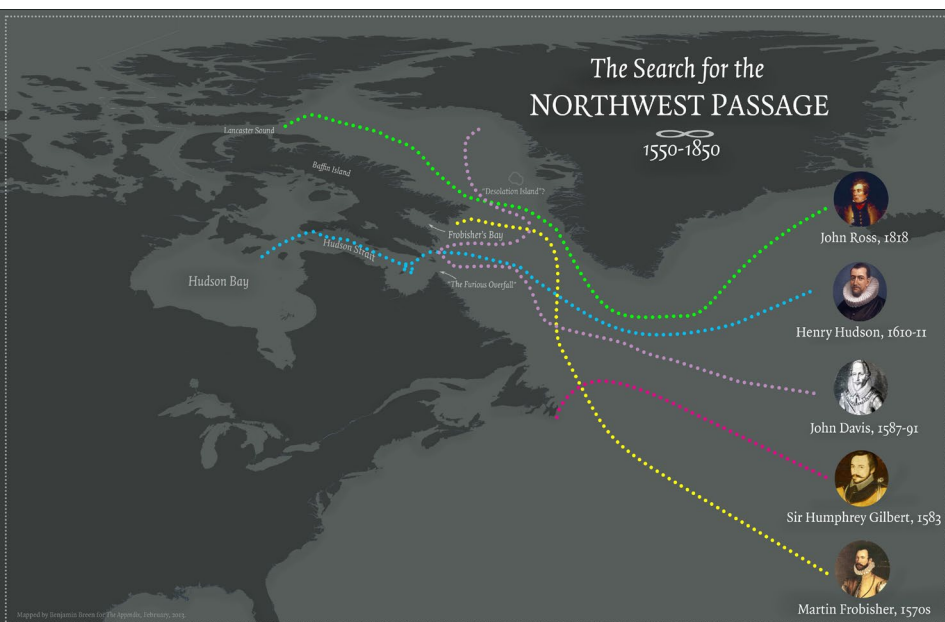
sage search temporarily out of momentum, a legal pursuit of Robert Bylot and other survivors of the 1610-11 Hudson voyage resumed. Bylot and three others were tried for murder in 1618. (Mutiny at the time did not exist as a legal concept in commercial voyages.) All were found not guilty, and none were ever heard from again.

John Ross entered Lancaster Sound on August 30, 1818 with two ships, the flagship *Isabella* and a smaller consort, the *Alexander*. Ross would observe that because the entrance "exactly answered to the latitude given by Baffin of Lancaster Sound, I have no doubt it was the same, and I consider it a most remarkable instance of the accuracy of that able navigator." Lieutenant Edward William Parry, who commanded the *Alexander*, wrote in his journal that day:

Here, Baffin's hopes of a passage began to be less, every day more than another; here on the contrary, mine begin to grow strong. I think there is something in his account, which gives cause to suspect he did not see the bottom of Lancaster Sound, i.e., whether it were really a sound or a strait, nor have we yet seen the bottom of it.

Yet with tantalizing open water before him, Ross concluded, as Baffin had, that there was no way through. Imagining what he called 'Croker's

Mountains' blocking their way, Ross ordered the ships to turn back. Some junior officers were incredulous, and they expressed their misgivings back in England. The following year, Parry returned to Lancaster Sound to prove that the mountains Ross had erected in their path the previous summer were at best a mirage, at worst a delusion. Lancaster Sound led into what Parry labeled Barrow Strait, which he used to sail clear across the Arctic archipelago,



A rough map of the routes sailed by Northwest Passage adventurers mentioned in the text.

Made with QGIS and Photoshop by Benjamin Breen, 2013.

some 600 nautical miles west to Melville Island. While sea ice would prevent Parry completing the passage to the Bering Strait that way, Lancaster Sound ultimately proved to be the entrance to the Northwest Passage everyone had been searching for since the late sixteenth century. Baffin, on the brink of a breakthrough, had been wrong not to investigate it, and 200 years later so had Ross.

Who knows how much John Ross was influenced in his 1818 decision at Lancaster Sound by an awareness that he was sailing in William Baffin's wake, and in the process was either refloating or sinking Baffin's reputation. Ross's admiration for what Baffin had accomplished in a far more primitive age of navigation may have produced its own psychological cul de sac: Ross could not deny the ancient navigator his wisdom, and he could not imagine a way into the high-Arctic archipelago beyond the perimeter of Baffin's experience. His expedition had become fundamentally concerned with salvaging the credibility of Baffin, a fellow Scot. In the process, Ross nearly sank his own.

John Ross returned to the Arctic with a private venture in 1829, now determined to prove the passage and salvage his reputation. He entered Lancaster Sound and turned south down the west side of Baffin Island into the Gulf of Boothia (so named for his backer, the gin distiller Sir Felix Booth). It was another dead end in the passage search's often tragic history. His ship, an experimental steam-powered vessel called the *Victory*, became trapped in ice and finally sank. Ross and his men endured four incredible years in this white tomb, aided at crucial times by the Inuit.*

* Relations with the Inuit were frequently unpredictable and bloody during the first phase of encounters with the English in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries, with abductions and killings on both sides. When the British Admiralty resumed a search of a Northwest Passage in the early nineteenth century, encounters were far more cordial. The Inuit helped keep John Ross's men alive in their multiyear marooning. But the British never absorbed all the lessons available to them on how to survive in the polar world.

In 1833 the survivors made a desperate bid to reach safety in an open boat. Back on Lancaster Sound, Ross confronted an apparition from his misguided past: the *Isabella*, the ship he had commanded in 1818 when he had decided this very sea passage did not exist. Now a whaler, the *Isabella* gathered up the *Victory*'s men and sailed Ross back through the mirage of Croker's Mountains that he had once spied from her very deck. The impossible had become the implausible.



V. The Matter of the Carpenter and the Boy

I will leave you with two of the more curious narrative threads of the Hudson mutiny that speak to appearance, disappearance, and re-appearance. The first involved Henry Hudson's son, John.

In 1613, John Hudson became the object of a rescue attempt by the French explorer Champlain, whose book *Des Sauvages* may have led Henry Hudson into the cul de sac that claimed him. Champlain had been told by a young Frenchman, Nicolas de Vignau, an interpreter trainee who had been living with the Kichesipirini, an Algonkian-speaking people of the Ottawa River, that he had made a journey with them to the Northern Sea. He had seen the wreckage of an English vessel, and had learned that a neighboring nation of the Kichesipirini, the Nebicerini, were holding an English boy captive from that wreck and wanted to make a gift of him to Champlain. The story made sense from what little was known back in France about the Hudson mutiny of 1611. With de Vignau as a guide, Champlain set out to collect the English boy and hopefully reach the Northern Sea himself.

That venture ended in terror and confusion in the Kichesipirini summer camp on the Ottawa River. Accused by the Kichesipirini of lying about the existence of the English boy and of ever having been to the Northern Sea, Nicolas de Vignau barely escaped with his



"There is something in his account, which gives cause to suspect... we yet seen the bottom of it."
Benjamin Breen, 2013, after Friedrich.

life, although Champlain then abandoned him to "the mercy of God" and an unknown fate at present-day Montreal. The fate of the English boy too remained unresolved: Champlain couldn't seem to decide whether what de Vignau had told him was the truth, a lie, or something in between.

Also lingering in the background of John Hudson's cryptic fate is whatever became of the ship's carpenter, Philip Staffe.

The mutineers had wanted Staffe to stay aboard the *Discovery*, to help ensure the ship endured the difficult voyage home, but once it was clear that the men who had been coaxed into the ship's boat would not be allowed back aboard, Staffe would not hear of remaining. One survivor, Bennet Mathew, attested that Staffe threatened to jump on the first ice floe that passed by

if the mutineers made him stay. The mutineers obligingly assigned Staffe to the boat, a large open craft called a shallop, allowing him his chest of personal belongings, along with other supplies.

The admiralty court's questioning of survivors in 1617 revealed an unusual suspicion as to the fate of Staffe. Robert Bylot avowed that the carpenter had gone into the boat "of his own accord, without any compulsion; whether he be dead or alive, or what has become of him, he knoweth not." The voyage's supercargo, Abacuck (Habakkuk) Prickett, was also asked to address Staffe's fate. His recorded reply: "he sayth he doth not knowe whether the shipp carpenter be deade or alive, ffor as he sayth he never sawe him since he was putt out of the shipp into the shallopp." Still the court persisted in this line of questioning. Another survivor, Francis Clement

insisted that Staffe was among those committed to the boat and that he had no idea whether Staffe was dead or alive.

The admiralty court seemed to be pressing survivors for evidence that Staffe was actually alive—as if the carpenter, against all odds, had been spotted strolling the streets of his native Ipswich. The court may have been suspicious of the fact that Staffe’s chest was the only one belonging to a castaway that hadn’t returned with the *Discovery* when she regained London.

When writing *God’s Mercies* I stared into the opening that this strange pattern of interrogation seemed to create: Staffe was neither an official victim nor an official survivor. Perhaps he had made a deal with the mutineers. He would stay aboard and help them get the *Discovery* home, but would be off the ship at the first opportunity, and no one was to be the wiser. Staffe was supposed to have been deeply loyal to Hudson, but Hudson had been so angered by Staffe’s initial refusal to build a shelter for the overwintering in James Bay that he had threatened to hang him. And so perhaps Staffe had made his bargain and slipped away when the *Discovery* first reached England, at Plymouth, taking his chest with him, before the ship moved on to its final destination of London. The survivors had been good to their word and insisted he had last been seen far astern of the *Discovery* with Henry and John Hudson and the rest in an ice-strewn James Bay.

That opening, that possibility of a living dead man, remains unexplored. You are welcome to see where it leads.



Further Reading:

Thomas Rundall, *Narratives of Voyages to the North-West, in Search of a Passage to Chathay and India, 1496 to 1631* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1849).

“Journal of the Voyage of John Knight to Seek the North-West Passage, 1606,” in *The Voyages of Sir James Lancaster, to the East Indies*, edited by Clements R. Markham (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1877).

John Ross, *A voyage of discovery, made under the orders of the Admiralty, in his majesty’s ships “Isabella” and “Alexander,” for the purpose of exploring Baffin’s Bay, and enquiring into the probability of a north-west passage* (London, 1819; 2nd ed., 2v., 1819).

Thomas A. Janvier, *Henry Hudson: A Brief Statement of his Aims and his Achievements* (Harper & Bros., 1909).



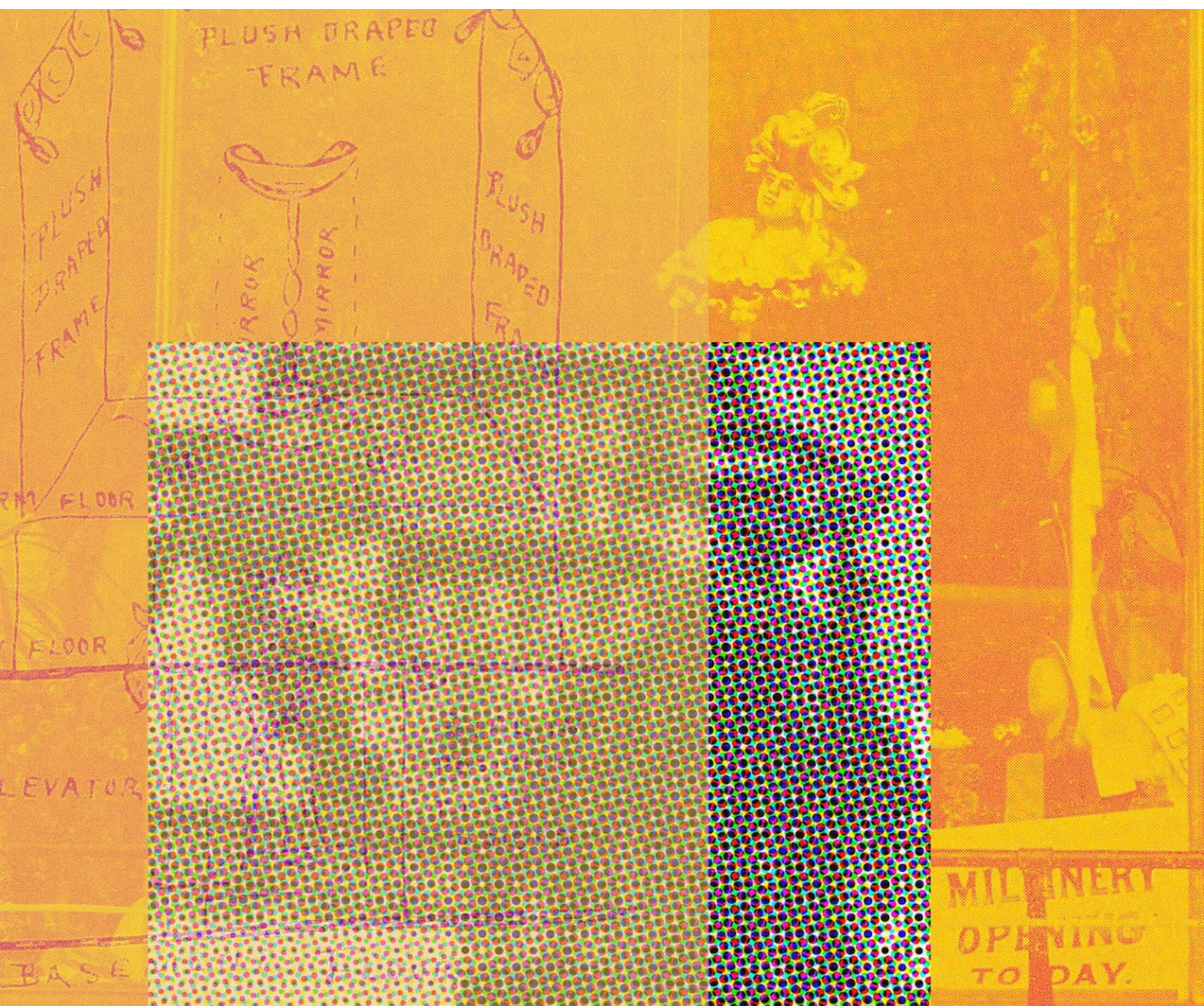
Notes

1. The concept of the “Indies” dated to Christopher Columbus’s time, and originally had spanned all the way from modern Ethiopia to China, which was called “Cathay.” The first English trading voyage to the Indies using the round-Africa route employed by the Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese was organized under the new East India Company in 1599.

2. The northern lands and waters probed by these mariners were not empty of humanity. European passage-seekers encountered the Inuit, who had relatively recently completed their own transit of the Arctic archipelago from the opposite direction. Their ancestors, the Thule, had moved eastward from Alaska, displacing the Dorset culture along the way. By the fifteenth century the Inuit had reached Baffin Bay and the Atlantic, and began moving aside the Innu down the Labrador coast in the sixteenth century. See Olive Patricia Dickason, *A Concise History of Canada’s First Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

3. Waymouth may have been trying to describe seawater on the verge of freezing. See “Voyage of Captain George Waymouth,” in Thomas Rundall, *Narratives of Voyages to the North-West in Search of a Passage to Chathay and India, 1496 to 1631* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1849).

4. That was Baffin’s second voyage into the Arctic archipelago in search of a passage. The first, in 1615, like the second, used Hudson’s ship the *Discovery* (which as noted likely was George Waymouth’s *Discovery*).



The Lady Vanishes

Amy Reading

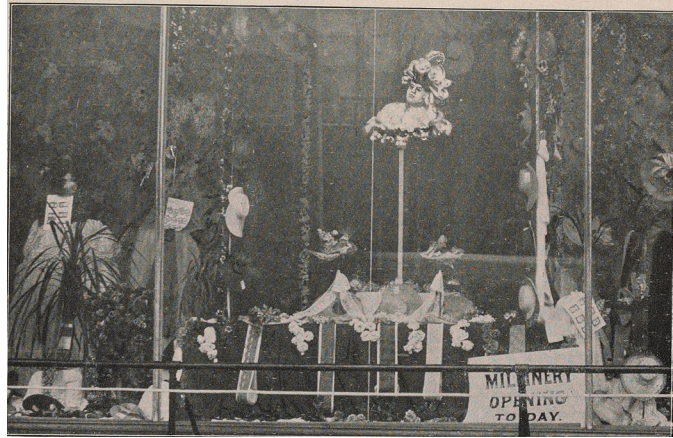
In the year 1900, the eerily disembodied shoulders, neck, and head of a pretty young woman appear in a department store window. There she is on a bustling city street in Chicago, a live model in a window display, unembarrassed by her missing half or the staring eyes of the pedestrians before her. Whether it is her absent torso and limbs or the fetching hat on her dark curls, she draws quite a crowd. Then, slowly, unaccountably, she vanishes into the floor. The crowd holds its breath. When she rises back up into view, she is wearing a new hat, but she is also covered in theory. Just dripping with it.

If you are standing in that crowd, perhaps you too feel a thrill as you gaze unabashedly at this strange woman, violating turn-of-the-century decorum. Perhaps you too scrutinize the velvety darkness where her lower half should be. Perhaps you catch the eye of a fellow watcher, sharing a moment of complicity with him. When he surges through the crowd and enters the department store, perhaps you too are tempted to cross the threshold and see what other wonders are displayed inside this new temple of commerce. But resist the urge to follow him. That fellow is almost certainly a “window gazer,” a decoy shopper hired by the department store to lure you from the sidewalk into the store.

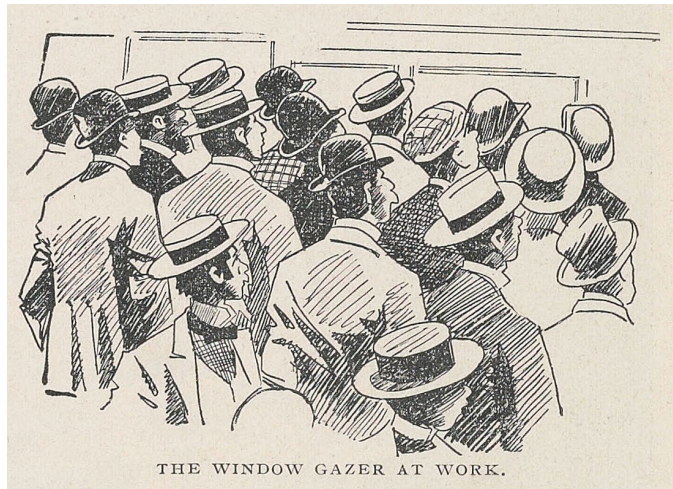
And try not to be beguiled by the woman who keeps appearing and disappearing before you every ten minutes. This particular window has already ensnared too many viewers in the century since her appearance—viewers disoriented within the glass shadowbox of moving and heavily-laden symbols.



As the story goes, “The Vanishing Lady” show window was a provocative new millinery display concocted by L. Frank Baum when he was a pioneering window dresser and the founder of a trade journal for the new profession called *The Show Window*, just before he wrote the book that would make him famous, *The Wizard of Oz*. Baum’s “vanishing lady” combined two innovations—a live model and a motorized stand—to entice passers-by in the modern city. As a spectacle, the window was a roaring success: so many people thronged to see the vanishing lady that the store



“The Vanishing Lady,” L. Frank Baum, *The Show Window*. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



“The Window Gazer at Work,” L. Frank Baum, *The Show Window*. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

was compelled to install an iron bar to keep the glass from cracking. As an advertisement, however, the window’s success is vexingly unknown: the whole point of the display was to sell hats, and sales data has not been preserved.

Nor has the name of the woman behind the glass.

By still another measure, its success continues. Baum’s display has become the most famous show window of its time, enthralling viewers to this day with its usefulness (often in combination with *The Wizard of Oz*) for the critical theory of gender, spectatorship, and consumer culture. The truncated woman is, most obviously, a symbol of the fate of women in the hands of a patriarchal culture, which puts them on a pedestal at a terrible cost. Or she is the relay in a smooth process that transformed the Victorian woman from a private home-

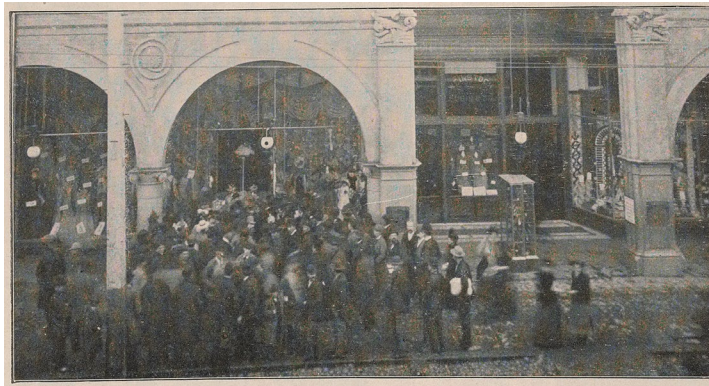
body staring at herself in a mirror, to a public, consuming creature, searching for herself on the cinema screen. The vanishing lady also symbolizes the return of the repressed; she is an “agent provocateur” who subverts the ease with which “the casual shopper [could] lose herself in fantastic identifications with the female image on display ... not least because that image keeps evading her.” Instead of seeing an idealized, hyper-fashionable version of herself in Baum’s Chicago show window, the casual shopper sees “a critical presence” who points to all the disfigured and absent bodies produced by modernity.¹

What all this theory does is ventriloquize the mute woman in the window, to make her indict Baum for the disavowed violence that his glittery spectacles concealed.



Except that the window display in question was not by L. Frank Baum; it did not appear in Chicago; and it did not appear in 1900. Though Baum included the above photo without credit in his 1900 book, *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors*, it was not his image or his display. The photo originally appeared in Baum’s trade journal in 1898, accompanying an article by the window’s designer, Chas. W. Morton, who invented the display for the Weinstock, Lubin & Co. department store in Sacramento, California, where he was the head window trimmer. It turns out that the “Vanishing Lady” show window speaks far less about some strange wizard behind the scenes, rubbing his hands together in glee as he designs the next way to oppress the masses, than it does about modern consumption as an anxious, experimental project.*

Morton had already made a name for himself as an innovator in window trimming. When



“The Crowd Before Weinstock, Lubin & Co.’s Sacramento Store Watching ‘The Vanishing Lady’”

Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

Weinstock’s opened their new store at K Street and Fourth Street in 1891, he designed a grand window scene, in which the floor would open to reveal a slowly rising and unfolding rose. Out of the rose would step a little girl, who would flit about the window with a fairy wand, trying on hats and other merchandise, before returning to her flower to be enclosed and lowered back into the floor. Three times a day for a week she repeated her performance, and the crowds were as enthusiastic as they would later be for the “vanishing lady” display in 1898. When Morton won the diamond medal for best display at the national convention of window trimmers the next year, perhaps it was the “vanishing lady” who elevated him above his East-coast peers. Morton’s avant-garde windows were a contrast to the “new” store within, where customers still sat on stools at long wooden counters to wait while salespeople brought them merchandise for inspection. The evolution of consumer culture was far from even.

Just as the show window gains history when the frame is enlarged from Baum’s book to Morton’s article in Baum’s journal, so do you attain a new vantage by noticing the literal frame around the Vanishing Lady’s window. Step back across the street, then, and notice what surrounds the enigmatically bobbing woman.²

* Nor was Baum quite the father of modern spectacle that contemporary scholarship on consumer culture has figured him to be. *The Show Window* was not the first journal on window trimming. *Harman’s Journal: Window Dressing and Decorating* was founded in 1893 and by 1896 Harry Harman had even started the field’s first professional organization, the Window Dressers’ Bureau. Baum’s efforts to assume ascendancy in the profession would appear to have been a success, however, because *Harman’s* ceased publication in 1899.

You see a stately white building whose main feature is the wall of show windows running along the sidewalk. Underneath the arches and hanging gas lamps, the windows are set back from the sidewalk by ten-foot-wide covered arcades and accented by freestanding glass display cases. The crowd in front of the window is, indeed, large enough to cause a passer-by to wonder what they're staring at. But look at the three women on the edge of the crowd, smudged by their own motion. Not for them a "fantastic identification with the female image on display" as they hurry along the periphery. No, the ones who are stilled on the sidewalk in enthrallment before the vanishing lady are all men.



Mr. Morton was most likely abashed at this outcome. The cardinal rule of window dressing, one that *The Show Window* hammered into its readers each month, was that art should forever be subordinated to sales. "If you can't make a pretty picture and sell goods at the same time, let the picture go, but make a display that will sell the goods ... [A] 'picture window,' in which the value or utility of the goods is sacrificed to make the picture, is not art, but foolishness." It was the beginning of a new commercial discourse, and show windows had to compete with newspaper advertisements and billboards to capture the notice of shoppers. The principles of design then unfolding were about the science of attention as much as the art of display.*

* The late nineteenth-century saw a radical transformation in the way goods were bought and sold in American cities. The department stores that evolved from dry goods stores in the 1870s and 1880s were enabled, first of all, by technological innovations like cast-iron architecture and the manufacture of large sheets of plate glass, which allowed for dramatic exteriors, and interiors with high ceilings and unbroken expanses of display space.

Inside these grand halls, store managers could stock an unprecedented variety of goods, and they revised traditional methods of negotiating a sale in order to turn over this stock faster. Instead of storing their goods in cabinets behind counters, to be pulled out and haggled over with each customer, department stores arrayed their goods in full view and gave each item a single fixed price. Customers were now free to enter department stores without the obligation to buy.

The first few decades of the department store saw a myriad of other innovations to the business of retailing—including the acceptance of returns, more flexible buying patterns from wholesalers which resulted in greater economies of scale and better discounts for customers, the creation of departments within department stores, and concessions to customers' comfort in the form of lounges, restaurants, free lectures, delivery services, and day care. But the most revolutionary change was the creation of an atmosphere of browsing. Rachel Bowlby describes the new mode of selling as a twin process of reinvention:

In the shift to consumer capitalism, then, modern commerce engages in a curiously double enterprise. On the one hand, a process of rationalization: the transformation of selling into an industry. The department stores are organized like factories, with hundreds of workers, shareholding companies, vast turnovers, and careful calculation of continual strategies of expansion. On the other hand, the transformation of industry into a shop window. This massive and revolutionary extension of scope is achieved by the association of commerce with ideological values that seem to be diametrically opposed to the mundane actuality of work, profits and rationality. The grands magasins, like the great exhibitions, appear as places of culture, fantasy, divertissement, which the customer visits more for pleasure than necessity.

By 1890, these structural foundations of modern consumption were in place, and department store managers now sought new ways to fill their wide aisles with enough customers to make profitable their expensive services. If department store managers previously focused their energies on providing the best and least expensive products to suit consumers' needs, after 1890 they increasingly turned their resources toward convincing consumers to desire more than what they strictly needed.



"Window shoppers at Marshall Field, Chicago, IL, 1910"
Via Historiful @ Tumblr



"Auerbach's department store window display with mannequins, Salt Lake City, UT, 1909"
Thread For Thought



"Herald Square, New York, NY, between 1900 and 1915"
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Done correctly, a show window would make the needs of a potential customer commensurate with the store's own desires. *The Show Window* offered a kind of rational fantasy of the show window's perfect viewer, a woman named Mrs. Smith, who begins the day by making a list of needed items. "As any well-regulated woman will do she looks carefully through the advertising pages of the daily paper, and notes those items that apply to her list." With several destinations in mind,

she starts out with a light heart and one of the first things that attracts her is Jenkins's big show window full of dress goods. Being interested in that line she glances at the window, and suddenly espies just the pattern she had in mind to buy. It is beautifully displayed, in broad daylight. The folds hang very prettily. Why go into a stuffy store and search for anything else when this so nicely fits the bill? Mrs. Smith goes into Jenkins's establishment and buys her dress.

The same fate befalls the other items on her list. "When seated in the car, homeward bound, she recalls the fact that outside of the thread and pins

(which were real bargains, you know) she had not bought a single article at the places she had intended." It is the balanced outcome: the customer's trajectory has only ever so slightly swerved away from her map and toward the magnet of the show window, but both store and customer have satisfied each other.

And the audience for window displays was always and forever women. The window dresser's own formulation of his mission was absolute: the consumer was female, and the window was not only for her—it was her. Mannequins were exclusively female and startlingly lifelike, even then.

As one window dresser put it, a woman should think to herself, "There is an idea that I could have worked out in my home" or "That dress is just the right combination of materials and colors."

Yet any photographer's casual glance at a city street in the early twentieth century would capture the fact that both men and women stopped to look inside the lighted boxes of desire ...



"Rosenberg Department Store, Taylor, TX, early 1900s"
City of Taylor, TX



"Window Display of 'Digestit,' a stomach relief patent medicine, at Brown's Drug Store, location unknown, 1915"
old-picture.com

... and sometimes just as casually capture the fact that the crowd was composed entirely of men.

Even window gazers, the decoy viewers whom Baum recommended that his readers hire in the very first article of the very first issue of *The Show Window*, were almost exclusively men, as were the window dressers themselves. Women looked and were looked at, but men directed the gaze. But they weren't terrifically good at it yet.



Just as the photographic evidence suggests that show windows were received in a different way than they were intended, so does *The Show Window* reveal that its trimmers and dressers couldn't always theorize what they were doing with the gaze they so fervently sought to capture. Attention turns out to be a dangerous, volatile thing, and the trade journal is a surprisingly dense and poetic record of how male window trimmers understood it in the customers they sought to control, and in themselves when they ventured out onto the streets and were arrested by their own artistry.

Our enigmatic lady is still rising and falling in her window, snagging our own attention. How might we access what the men clustered in front of her were thinking as they stared?

Once again, the answer comes from widening the frame, this time backward into history, to what the crowd might have been remembering. The "Vanishing Lady" show window recapitulated one of the most marvelous illusions from the golden age of stage magic in the mid-1880s, by the French magician Bautier de Kolta. As rival magician Alexander Herrmann wrote, "Its very success was its ruin, so transcendent was it in mystification," because each illusionist soon devised his own method of staging the trick, and it became a compulsory item on every magician's program.*

* "If I were asked to designate any one particular illusion as the most brilliant I know, I should unhesitatingly mention that of the vanishing lady, invented by Bautier de Kolta. Its very success was its ruin, so transcendent was it in mystification. The effect of the trick upon the spectator, the first time he sees it, is nothing short of marvellous. The performer brings forward a lady to the front of the stage, seats her upon a chair in full view of the spectators, spreads over her a piece of filmy silk, so gauzy that the outlines of her figure may be discerned through it, and while she is in this position he whisks off the silk. The chair is there; the lady has vanished.

"The explanatory details of this wonderful trick, which are now known by every tyro in the profession, would weary rather than instruct. I have often experimented with the trick myself as a curiosity. Suffice it to say that the elaborate mechanical operations necessary for its production would almost build a locomotive, and yet they are exhausted in a hundred springs and bolts of steel working like the springs of a watch and all cooperating, with the aid of a confederate working through a trap-door under the stage."

De Kolta would walk out onto the stage with an attractive young woman. First he would shake out a piece of newspaper and place it on the stage, so as to later prove that the floorboards had been undisturbed. Upon the newspaper, he would place a chair, and then he would invite the young woman to sit. In Paris, he gave her a mysterious elixir. In London, she prettily folded her hands over her lace handkerchief. He would then cover her with a giant black silk cloth, long enough to obscure her body but transparent enough to keep her visible. He would take a few moments to arrange it around the folds of her dress and tie it behind her head. And then, with a flick of the wrist, he would whisk the silk off. A lace handkerchief would be all that remained on the empty chair. Even the silk in his hands would be gone. To riotous applause, de Kolta would walk to the side of the stage and escort the young woman back out before the footlights.³

Ten years later (and two years before Morton's window display), the former magician and father of modern cinema, Georges Méliès, restaged de Kolta's illusion as a cinematic special effect in *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert Houdin*. In his fantasy, the woman's disappearance is total, and the magician frantically tries to conjure her back into the chair, at first producing a skeleton, before reappearing the lady herself, fan still demurely in hand.

There, did you catch the trick of it? If the woman in the show window reminded the audience of her predecessors on stage and in film, they might have been jolted to realize the similarity was not just in the image of the wordless, flickering woman, but also in their own response. Just as at a magic show, the men in front of the window would have leaned in to see how the trick was worked. This was a reaction long cultivated by American popular entertainment from P.T. Barnum onward. It has gathered a cumbersome list of names over the years, that particular gesture of bending toward the ruse, from the "operational aesthetic" to "looking askance." Put another way, the men on the sidewalk were doing exactly the same thing as the men writing in *The Show Window*: trying to figure out the principles behind the deception. How was it done?⁴



The window dressers' answer to this question was surprisingly mechanical. They did not try to work on an unconscious level of psychology. *The Show Window* understood the act of selling as simply the act of getting the consumer's attention. The typical window illustrated in the journal contained an eye-catching scene that just happened to involve a line of products in an ancillary manner—for instance, a perfect replica of the Brooklyn Bridge built from spools of thread, or a floor-length ball gown made from crisply-folded handkerchiefs.



"Department store window, handkerchiefs, location unknown, between 1910 and 1926"
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

"We must startle them," declared *The Show Window*, "surprise them, interest them, in order to cajole them into spending their money in our individual establishment instead of our neighbor's." The art of persuasion seems to have been a two-step process, in which a pedestrian was first captured by an arresting image and then made to notice a valuable product.

But it was this "noticing" that was itself in doubt at the turn of the century. The new discipline of experimental psychology was taking deception seriously, leaning way, way in to spot the fraud as it was underway, scrutinizing it under laboratory conditions in order to learn the rules of conscious-

ness. Four scholars in particular—Joseph Jastrow, one of the founders of the American Psychological Association, Max Dessoir, Norman Triplett, and Alfred Binet—brought stage magicians into their laboratories to film their prestidigitations, and what they discovered is that the more the mind knows itself, the longer the list of ways it can be deceived. Magicians used the very principles of empiricism to misdirect the audience's gaze. The psychologists of deception theorized that this susceptibility was inevitable and insurmountable. Triplett wryly noted that, "fixed mental habits, evolved for useful purposes, to avoid being surprised and deceived, are the very agents employed by the conjurer to effect this end."^{*}

But if attention could be so fickle, what was the link between getting someone's attention and getting a sale?

The *Show Window* had no ready-made answer to this fundamental question, and each monthly issue further refined their hypotheses about the process. At the turn of the century, the link appeared to be the inherent quality of the goods in their new profusion and variety. Under the right conditions, simply the display of the merchandise was enough to move it. Windows needed to be flashy because of competition, but the fundamental premise behind such advertising was simple: clearing away other visual distractions was sufficient for the goods to rivet the minds of consumers.⁵

So in this scheme, goods had agency—not people. Advertising was not a question of coercion or persuasion because there was no resistance to break down. Advertising was purely a matter of awareness and attention. It was as if there was a direct passageway between one's eyes and one's desire or willpower, and appealing to the former seized the latter.

And for many of the viewers before the window, this theory proved all too true. A shocking number of middle-class women testified to being so overwhelmed by show windows and the sensory stimuli inside the department stores that, quite despite themselves, they stole from the tables heaped high with goods. "The things were there," one woman confessed, and she could "no more control the action of her hands than she could fly."

^{*} The psychologists agree with the magicians that a spectator's attempt to penetrate the illusion will always fail. "If you know how a conjurer causes a dollar to disappear, you know nothing, and you will be deceived hundreds of times by this same trick," Dessoir writes in "Psychology of the Art of Conjuring," pp. 137-8. "What makes prestidigitation the art of deception is not the technical outward appearance, but the psychological kernel."

Dessoir and Jastrow both discover that kernel lodged in the space between two fundamental rules of stage magic: never tell an audience beforehand what you are about to do, and really do first that which you want the audience to believe you have done later. So, for instance, when making a ball disappear in midair, the magician should not announce that the ball will disappear on the fourth toss, but should straightforwardly toss the ball into the air three times before palming it and only pantomiming the fourth toss—most audiences will report that they saw the ball leave the magician's hand only to vanish on the way up.

Jastrow explains in "The Psychology of Deception," published in the December 1888 issue of *The Popular Science Monthly*, that this misperception is because "we are creatures of the average; we are adjusted for the most probable event; our organism has acquired the habits impressed upon it by the most frequent repetitions; and this has induced an inherent logical necessity to interpret a new experience by the old, an unfamiliar by the familiar" (p. 147). The magician effectively prevents the audience from making their own inference about what will happen and instead implants a false inference.

Dessoir notes two basic principles of perception that magicians manipulate in order to substitute their own suggestions. The first is association: to create the impression that he has opened a paper bag, the magician need merely create the snapping sound that we associate with the action. The second is imitation: to divert attention from the manipulations of his left hand, the magician need merely gaze hypnotically at the wand in his right hand for the audience to do the same. (The paper bag example comes from Jim Steinmeyer, *Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2003), p. 117.)

Dessoir might well have pointed out that these principles resemble John Stuart Mills's laws of the mind as he enumerated them in *A System of Logic*, Ratiocinative and Inductive. Specifically, laws such as "when two impressions have been frequently experienced (or even thought of) either simultaneously or in immediate succession, then whenever one of these impressions, or the idea of it, recurs, it tends to excite the idea of the other." Magicians succeed by turning the mind against itself.

The phenomenon of the respectable shoplifter exploded in the decades before the turn of the century and challenged the orthodoxies about class and gender roles that department stores purportedly reinforced.

For other viewers, though, the transgression urged upon them by the windows was less overt. The “peripatetic philosophers,” as the *Show Window* termed the city’s male *flâneurs*, quickly discovered that an alluring display might sabotage what Walter Benjamin called “illustrative seeing,” the detached, amused observation of the urban scenery. A millinery window like the one that featured the “Vanishing Lady” could serve as “fresh matter on which to nourish his musings.” The hat display is

really a delightful little affair, although men are not supposed to be interested in such matters. However, they will cast stealthy glances in at the windows now and then, and the funny, fluffy little bits one sees there are not so unattractive, after all. There are white mousseline arrangements—they must be baby hoods. These are generally nestling at the stalks of painted wooden standards upholding those terrific collections of mineral, animal and vegetable matter called ‘bonnets.’ These are dreadful, but somehow they fascinate one, and then they allure one to gaze on.

But too often in the *Show Window*, this attention to feminized objects unsettles the viewer. Another philosopher was disturbed to find that one window “kept me a prisoner for half an hour a while ago, and the queerest thing about it is the fact that it is the window of a millinery establishment, and is filled with all the latest ribbons and feathers and flowers.” The window hijacked his thoughts and sent him back into his own past: “I found myself thinking about those Paris hats and comparing them with the old checkered sunbonnet my mother used to wear.”

The problem is that the objects in the window are not inert. The most telling example of male bewitchment is an astonishing story called “The Merciful Wax Lady,” in which a man criticizes the seductive arts and shameless, aloof demeanor of window mannequins, for whom “the most ardent glance cannot provoke a blush on their cheeks.”

He then wonders if his critique is overly harsh, so he shows his writing to a wax lady, who confirms that she does, indeed, have the power to “haunt him to his dying day, and forever keep him from a human woman’s arms.” In a reversal of the male gaze that imprisons its female object, the mannequin’s gaze threatens to dissolve the writer’s sense of self. “She turned and gazed full into my eyes. For a minute I was lost. The world fell from me and I could not think or hear, or feel aught but the glory of her eyes. Then she turned away her head disdainfully. ‘Go, poor fool!’ she said. ‘If I but willed it, you would never more leave my side. But I am merciful—go!’”

The direct passageway between the eye and the mind that the *Show Window* theorized grows labyrinthine. No longer do objects make claims for the mind calmly to weigh and judge. The rational fantasy of a window that aids a well-regulated shopper falters, because the goods in the window are not self-evident. They do not signify only their own inherent worth. Suddenly they move and talk, and when they no longer stay still, the question of who is influencing whom grows slippery. Instead of a window display so interesting that it engrosses the female pedestrian and causes her to consider a commodity, we see show windows that ensnare the male pedestrian and cause him to reconsider his very self. If this process happens despite the intentions of the male pedestrian, who grants the objects in the display their power? Who is in control of the narratives, associations, and images prompted by the spectacles in the window?

In one *Show Window* poem, a wife complains at the overly affectionate attention her window trimmer husband lavishes on his mannequin. In a short story, a doll resists the trimmer’s efforts to pose her in the window—a struggle in which the trimmer is described as a “brute” who violates his “victim” first by wrenching her into place and then by forcing her to hold a sign advertising herself for sale. A feature article trumpets the cleverness of a black display mannequin that “will well repay, as an advertisement, any merchant who consents to purchase a little nigger, even though slavery is a thing of the past.” The journal could not be more literal about its own anxieties.

Again and again in the pages of the *Show Window*, stories and poems inject personality into the lifeless objects inside the displays, to explain their disproportionate ability to fascinate. This is exactly the *opposite* move detected by critical theory, which tends to see violence or deadening in the window displays, or the urge to deny the commodity status of the goods by aestheticizing them. But in fact the window trimmers at the turn of the century were haunted by the power they had unleashed. Did it have a limit?⁶

Live female models parade around the windows in circles, holding cards with the prices of their dresses on them. A hypnotist puts his wife to sleep in a window and leaves her there for the crowds to stare. “Even men did not disdain to gaze curiously upon the hypnotized form,” L. Frank Baum marvels. A Native American man dresses his “squaw” in furs and leaves her to sleep in a trading post window.

How far does fungibility extend? Can personhood somehow be accidentally traded away or bestowed through seemingly routine commerce in material goods? *The Show Window’s* anxiety spilled over onto itself. Repeatedly, in stories and poems, it is the window trimmers themselves who are “bought” when their displays so seduce their customers, male and female, that they storm inside and imperiously propose marriage. One trimmer

is propositioned with “a brand new dime.”

If the *Show Window’s* vantage on the turn of the century is representative, then it allows us to peer at something often obscured in the onrushing modernity of the age: the fear that accompanied emergent display technologies and design trends. The gaze that window trimmers coerced and conducted could go awry, could turn around and engulf them, like a stage illusion that vanishes the magician. Perhaps this is why so many windows depicted the act of consumption.

All windows acted as synecdoches for the store inside, a kind of visual index to the class status for sale with the currency of taste. But many of those windows metonymized consumer culture in a more forthright way by depicting it explicitly and literally, seeking to pin in place the actors in their roles. It is this quality, the self-reflexivity of a hyperfictional form, that L. Frank Baum’s journal, the *Show Window*, reveals to us even as it depicts the straying gaze. What the vanishing lady demonstrates is not the unswerving male dominance that we find in theory, but the jolt and lurch of male anxiety as it moves along the uneven tracks of modernity in the consuming age.

The lady is reappearing within her window. Lean closer. Do you see how it’s done?



Notes

1. Indeed, sometimes the critic must himself do violence to the vanishing lady in order to wrench her into his theoretical frame. Stuart Culver repeatedly refers to her as a “manikin” in order to stress her similarity to Baum’s Scarecrow, a being who is only real when organized around a lack or a desire, for which the jaunty hat is poor compensation. Stuart Culver, “What Manikins Want: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and the Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows,” *Representations* 21 (1988): 97-116.

2. Baum would approve. One of the many suggested displays in *The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors* was the “Framed Form,” a

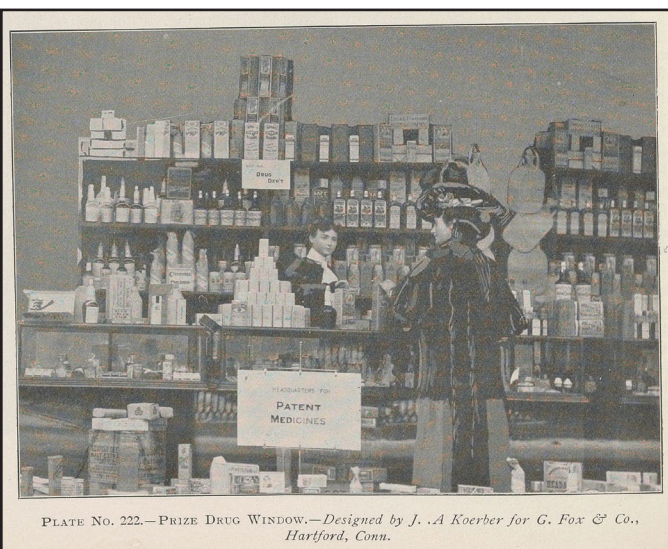
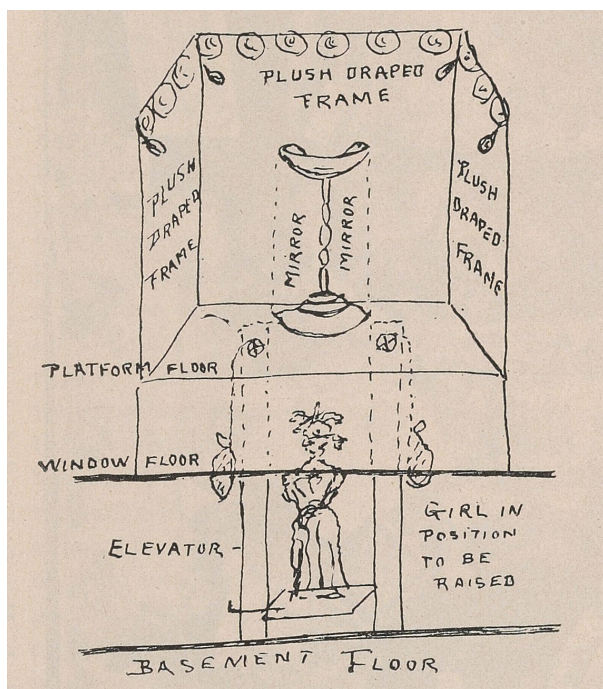


PLATE NO. 222.—PRIZE DRUG WINDOW.—Designed by J. A. Koerber for G. Fox & Co., Hartford, Conn.

Prize drug window from *The Show Window*
Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University



Drawing of the mechanism behind the *Vanishing Lady* show window

L. Frank Baum, *The Show Window*, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

window that mimicked the display of paintings on gallery and museum walls by placing a large, empty gilt frame in front of a dress mannequin, who would be dramatically lit against a dark background.

3. See also David Devant, *My Magic Life* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1931) in which he describes watching de Kolta's version and then restaging the trick with two identical women.

4. Neil Harris coined the term "operational aesthetic" to describe mid-nineteenth-century entertainment in *Humbug* (1973), and Michael Leja updates the term for the turn of the century in *Looking Askance* (2004). See also Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (1993) for the term "mimetic excess;" Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," (1989) for the "aesthetics of astonishment;" Paul Staiti, "Illusionism, Trompe l'Oeil, and the Perils of Viewership," (1992), which uses the term "phenomenology" in sussing out the cognitive process of looking at *trompe l'oeil*; and James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception* (2001), which uses the term "artful deception."

5. "When a merchant goes to any expense

connected with his business the object is to sell goods. There are several ways to do this through the show window. One is to display a shirt waist or a pair of shoes or any other articles so prominently that they attract the attention of the passer-by, who, seeing their desirably qualities, is induced to step in and purchase. If but one plate glass window existed in a town, that window, filled with any class of goods, would surely sell them. But there is competition everywhere—even in selling goods—and plate glass fronts line the streets of every village. No need to enter a store to know its contents; they most desirable items of the stocks are open to the gaze of all outsiders." "Up-to-date Ideas," *The Show Window* 2 no. 5 (April 1, 1898): 143.

6. For an example of how critical theory sees violence or deadening in window display, see Karen Beckman's *Vanishing Women* (which describes "Baum's" window as "the subtly gruesome spectacle of fashion fineries draped over a dismembered female body"). For how theorists read those displays as denying goods their commodity status, see Leja, *Looking Askance*, 149 and Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 55.

Fiction: Woman Filing Her Nails

Gregory Bogaerts

Rose knows she's got no clean clothes except for one frock she's been saving so she sits on the bed filing her nails with a nightie pulled around her limbs, the frothy lacy top barely hiding her breasts. It's been raining for a week now, and most of her garments are sodden on the line strung between the ledge of her bedsitter window and the brick tenement across the other side of cobblestone alley. She glances out the window, smeared with fat from cooking bacon and chips on the one gas ring in the bedsit, and looks at the clothes, thinks they look like exotic coloured birds wet through, out of their clime, huddled together for warmth against the weather.

Rose shivers, but it is warm in the bedsitter because it is so small and the warmth from Rose's body heats the confined space. A bit stuffy she thinks, but better than being outside in that lot. She breaks a nail; the purple bits fall like pottery shards all over the unmade bed. Rose swears softly under her breath. Not like the last time something happened to upset her.

Swearing like a trooper under fire, Rose was with the landlady, living right next door, knocking on the door demanding to know what the commotion was all about. Rose opening the door a liz-



ard-smile-sliver to stop the woman looking in. All curlers, bunions and damp smelly dressing gown, the landlady, and a nose as long as an elephant's trunk ready for snooping into the affairs of her lodgers.

But Rose wasn't about to be intimidated by that baggage, not like the other boarders were. She wouldn't let her in when the woman demanded entrance to inspect her property.

"Yer not comin' in here. Yer inspect with notice to me not off the cuff, and yer know it. I pay me rent on time so yer've no reason to whinge," she told the woman.

"I don't have to put up with language like that comin' through the walls," the landlady replied.

"Well then, I shouldn't have to put up with the noise yer make when yer gentleman friend comes callin' on yer. Like a stuck pig yer were last time, snortin' and squealin'. Yellin' for him to put it all in," said Rose.

The woman turned the colour of the cheap tawny port she drank late at night, turned on her heel, went back inside her flat, slamming the door after her. Rose shut her door, turned and went back to her gentleman friend in her bed, the man sitting there sheepish and apologetic because he'd spilt red wine on the sheets and set Rose off, turning the air blue.

Rose smiles to herself now, remembering the incident, and she wonders where Johnny Shortcross is now. She hasn't seen him in almost a year; the last she saw of him was that night he spilt the wine, Johnny later standing under her window and waving to her, his duffle bag jammed under one arm, his big cheesy grin shining like a light in the night. But his black shirt and brown dungarees faded quickly into the murk of the alley as he headed off looking for work.

It's all he seems to do, look for work, thinks Rose as she carefully shapes the small nail of the little finger of her left hand, holds it up to the lamp-light. It looks like a tiny moon, reflecting her face so she looks back at herself; self-consciously she pulls the nightie up to hide her breasts from her

sight.

She ponders the proposal of marriage Johnny left her with the last time she saw him. Down on bended knees he went, and he looked so ridiculous, so comical Rose burst out laughing, and set the landlady knocking on the dividing wall. It was all he could do to get the words out, embarrassed by Rose's laughter, and hampered by the terrible stammer that only ever disappeared for a little while after he'd made love to Rose.

Occasionally she gets an envelope, Johnny's name rudely scrawled on the front, a money order inside. He can't read or write so Rose knows what an effort it must have cost him to commit his name in ink on paper. But the money order is more than money; it is a poem that tells her he loves her, and Rose weeps.

Sometimes she imagines she sees the dried sweat on the money order because she knows Johnny Shortcross isn't sitting somewhere in a nice cool office writing letters on expensive lettershead paper. He's out in the paddocks of far western New South Wales ploughing, or he's under the searingly-hot tin roof of a shearing shed in The Territory taking the fleece from two hundred sheep a day or he's bent over wielding the steel blade into the thick stalks of sugar cane in Queensland.

But when will he come home she wonders, does he even remember how to get back to me, does he want to come back even though he sends me money on occasions? It's lonely for a girl by herself in Glebe, Sydney, with the rain falling like a leaden veil, and a landlady waiting for the merest excuse to chuck her out on the street.

Rose wonders about her new gentleman friend; he's almost a complete mystery to her, not someone she'd normally rub shoulders with or anything else with for that matter. Mr. Bates is what she calls him because she doesn't know his first name. It's like going out with your own father or a schoolteacher too old to be playing around with young girls.

He'll be here soon, she knows, and although she finds his company awkward, it's nice because Mr. Bates intimidates the landlady, who sticks her

head around her door when he arrives, smiles and blushes when he says good evening to her. Honestly you'd think she was about to curtsy to him sometimes, the way she grovels thinks Rose, and starts filing the nails of the other hand.

As she files, she's careful not to dislodge the sliver of diamond inset in the index finger nail; a present from Mr. Bates who seems to want to please Rose in any way he can. Rose looks at the eye of diamond and it blinks at her the way the eyes of the feral cats in the alley blink at her when she sits on the window ledge at night to get a breath of fresh air.

Rose looks at the eye of diamond and it blinks at her the way the eyes of the feral cats in the alley blink at her.

Rose thinks about her first meeting with Mr. Bates, that balmy summer evening with the air full of musk and roses as Rose walked along Pit Street, not wanting to go back to her bedsitter in Glebe where the air smelt like rotten bananas. She wanted to be out and about even if there was little in the way of amusement, not since the crash hit in America and the clubs, the dives and dens of Sydney boarded up their premises with wood and tin.

But it was enough for the young woman to walk amongst the throng of passersby, to hear their voices, smell the cigarette smoke of the men, the perfume of the women. It took away the loneliness as she pretended she knew every one of them, pretended they would all stop and chat with her. Then some of them would invite her to a comfortable brick and tile home on the North Shore with steaming lamb, vegetables and a boat of hot gravy on the table, and some decent plonk winking at her in fine crystal glasses.

Thoughts of wine, lamb and a warm North Shore home made her careless, and she walked straight into the man, standing on the corner, and knocked him flat on his back. All apologies she was until he told her not to worry. He asked her to

come with him for a drink in the saloon bar of one of the pubs down along The Rocks. A bit rough for someone like Mr. Bates, Rose thought later, but he didn't want to see her walk away from him into the crowd, she knew. And so it went from there.

Suddenly there's a knock at the door and Rose knows it's him even though he's half an hour early. It's a habit with Mr. Bates, turning up early as though he's keen to find her unprepared, but for what she doesn't know. And she is unprepared, rushes to the door to rescue him from the landlady.

Opening the door with one hand, she pulls the nightie over her nakedness with the other hand, and he's there, holding a bunch of carnations, funeral with their red and white markings. His eyes play over her form under the garment, but she has no choice other than to let him in because she hears the creak of the landlady's door.

"Evening Mr. Bates," sings the landlady.

"Piss off!" spits Rose.

She regrets it straight away, but it doesn't seem to bother her visitor, and the smile spreads broadly in his face as he steps into the bedsitter, closing the door behind him. Rose looks at him, sees the three upper teeth armoured with gold. She sees the narrow rabbit shoulders, and the skin that looks like the white, slippery belly of a shark Rose once saw pulled from the harbour when she was a child. She makes him turn his back, and slips into her one clean frock.

He takes her out on the tram; they sit on the same seat in silence. Rose sticks her head out the window as the vehicle trundles into the leafy suburbs of the North Shore, she smells the sea spray and she laughs for the sheer joy of it. Pushes from her mind the thought of returning to the Glebe later.

Mr. Bates pulls the cord, they get off and walk; her high heels hammer pistol shots on the pavement. Mr. Bates, his hand under her right elbow, directs her down an alley and stops. He looks up, and Rose follows his gaze. She sees the room at the top of the apartment block; it is golden with electric light.

“It’s for you, Rose. If you want it,” says Mr. Bates. “I’ll pay the rent and you stay there. I’ll see you three times a week when I can get away from my family. No more landladies, no more smell, no more rats.”

Rose looks at the light and, for a second, she imagines she sees Johnny Shortcross struggling towards her, wading his way through the thick amber.



Russel Drysdale, a famous Australian painter, is known for his bleak desert landscapes of Australia. I find the same bleakness in the painting *Woman Filing Her Nails*. It is easy to see the setting as warm and even welcoming, but the single room is stifling for the woman and the viewer of the painting. There is a desolation despite the fact that it is a very sexy painting; the woman’s legs and breasts are almost completely exposed. There is the suggestion of prostitution; the woman may well be waiting for another client to arrive. In my story, I made the main character instead face the choice between her rich older lover and the man she loves, Johnny Shortcross.



Andean Atlantis: Race, Science and the Nazi Occult in Bolivia

Matthew Gildner

BOLIVIA, 1928.

As the train steamed around the bend, Lake Titicaca became visible far to the north. The morning sun danced on the water. The majestic Cordillera Real towered beyond. The whistle howled. The engine lurched. After an arduous journey from Berlin, amateur archeologist and future SS commander Edmund Kiss had finally reached his destination: the ruins of the ancient city-state of Tiwanaku.*

Tiwanaku had been an object of western fascination since 1549, when a motley band of Spanish conquistadors encountered the ruins deep in the Andes, in what is today Bolivia. Massive stone gateways, enormous granite megaliths, colossal earthworks, intricately-carved stele, mysterious glyphs—the Spaniards marveled at

* The spelling of Tiwanaku has varied significantly since the Spanish first discovered the ruins in the sixteenth century. Spanish chroniclers used Tiaguanco. Early republican antiquarians and travel accounts use Tiahuanacu, Tiahuanaco, or Tihuanacu. In accordance with modern standards of written Aymara and recent archeological research, I use Tiwanaku.

their discovery. Asked of the origins of the ruins and the fate of the civilization that constructed them, local indigenous *caciques*, or lords, stated that they were from a time long past, and that their original inhabitants had been destroyed by a great flood.

Its antiquity so obvious, its provenance so uncertain, Tiwanaku became one of the great mysteries of modern archeology. During the nineteenth century, the ruins attracted a host of European naturalists that speculated on the civilization that built the monumental structures. Some attributed the site to ancient Egyptians, others to bearded Europeans. All agreed that the ancestors of Lake Titicaca's local peoples, the Aymara, would have been incapable of accomplishing such a magnificent feat. But if native Andeans hadn't constructed Tiwanaku, then who had?

Kiss disembarked at Tiwanaku with a bold theory. Tall and bespectacled, his face pink from the unrelenting Altiplano sun, he stood out among the Aymara porters shuffling past. Their rural, 'uncivilized' condition only strengthened his conviction that the ruins were built a million years ago by his Aryan ancestors—an ancient Nordic race—who had migrated from the Lost City of Atlantis.

Kiss's Atlantis theory may have been strange; but stranger still was the fact that it was hardly new. For decades, Bolivians themselves had been pondering their Altantean ancestry—in fact, for many of the same reasons that Kiss had. A connection to Atlantis empowered Bolivia's European-descendant aristocracy for the very same reasons that it attracted Nazis. It gave them their own private Garden of Eden; and it reinforced the myth of white supremacy.



A fanciful reconstruction of Tiwanaku from Richard Inwards's *Temple of the Andes* (London, 1884).

ATHENS, 350 BCE.

The legend of Atlantis traces its origins to Plato, who introduced the fabled city in the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*. He told of an advanced island civilization beyond the "Pillars of Hercules" that was ruled by a "remarkable dynasty of Kings" endowed with unimaginable wealth. The Kings, having grown overzealous, set out to conquer Athens and enslave its peoples. The Athenians mobilized a heroic defense. But the conflict angered the gods. They sent earthquakes and floods, and Atlantis was "swallowed up by the sea and vanished."

Classicists have long maintained that Atlantis was a fable that the ancient philosopher invented to warn of the arrogance of power. Over the centuries, however, Plato's legend acquired an air of truth. During the Renaissance, tales of Atlantis circulated in the European imagination, borne on Humanist inquiry and the discovery of the Americas. Sixteenth-century Spanish chroniclers, from Bartolomé de las Casas to Francisco López de Gómara, drew parallels between the New World and Plato's Lost City, as did Francis Bacon and Thomas Moore of Great Britain. For French scholars who believed that humans had multiple origins, Atlantis evidenced the existence of man before Adam.

But it was during the late nineteenth century that interest in the fabled Lost City exploded. A Minnesota politician and amateur anti-

quarian named Ignatius Donnelly is widely credited for the Atlantis revival. In 1882, his bestseller, *Atlantis: The Antediluvial World*, didn't just argue that Plato's Atlantis existed; it claimed that Atlantis had shaped other ancient cultures, from the Maya to the Egyptians. Popular and scientific interest in Atlantis flourished. The Royal Geographic Society of London and the U.S. National Geographic Society were soon sponsoring research on the lost city's location and funding quixotic and, at times, unnecessarily deadly expeditions.¹

It's often overlooked that this "Atlantis revival" coincided with the apogee of polygenesis, one of the fundamental assumptions of scientific racism. Polygenesis was an alternative theory of evolution that rejected the common origins of humans, a belief rooted in Christian creationism and sustained by Darwinian evolution. Polygenists divided humans into separate biological species, or races, that each originated and evolved independently. Races were classified according to innate, inheritable physical attributes—that is, not just skin color, but cranial capacity.

Locating those origins, however, was more complicated. If darker skinned peoples originated in Africa, as polygenists had long assumed, the where did the lighter-skinned peoples come from?

Atlantis would provide nineteenth-century polygenists with their own private Garden of Eden—an idea that appealed especially to Bolivia's creole, or European-descendant, elite. Since securing their independence from Spain in 1825, they governed—often precariously—the most indigenous country in the hemisphere. Polygenesis provided irrefutable scientific proof of their biological difference and social superiority over native Andean peoples. And deployed alongside the Atlantis myth, it allowed them to claim Tiwanaku as a source of creole heritage.



LA PAZ, 1925.

Twenty kilometers southeast of Lake Titicaca, on the high plateau straddling Peru and Bolivia, Tiwanaku was once the administrative and ceremonial center of a vast Andean empire. Stratigraphic

excavations carried out by Wendell Bennett in the 1930s indicated that the civilization emerged as early as 300 BCE and reached its apex between 600 and 800 AD. Radiocarbon dating subsequently confirmed its age, and archeologists today generally agree that Tiwanaku was built by the ancestors of the Aymara-speaking peoples who populate the Lake Titicaca basin today.

Such a claim was laughable in the Bolivia of Belisario Díaz Romero. Born in La Paz in 1870 to a wealthy family of Spanish provenance, Díaz belonged to an elite class of statesmen and intellectuals that reaped enormous profits by exporting natural resources and exploiting indigenous labor. The republic they governed was overwhelmingly made up of native Americans—largely Aymara- and Quechua-speaking peoples in the highlands and valleys of the Eastern Andean Escarpment.

Creole wealth rested on their access to indigenous labor; their social privilege and political legitimacy rested on a shared conviction that indigenous Bolivians belonged to an inferior race.

Among the creole gentleman scholars who shored up such beliefs, Díaz stood apart. He practiced medicine, wrote history, experimented with botany, and studied geography, linguistics, and archaeology. He was a member of the Geographic Society of La Paz, the National Institute of Statistics, and the National Academy of History. He directed the Meteorological Observatory and the National Museum. Sharp yet soft-spoken, he was the last of Bolivia's great polymaths.

His most original contribution to Bolivian science was in evolutionary biology. Díaz vehemently rejected creationism, and was an early proponent of natural selection. Yet he dismissed Darwin's belief in the common origins of the human species, embracing instead the polygenic theories of leading French and German biologists. He divided the human species into "three living and permanent races: the white race, the yellow, and the black." *Homo niger* originated in Africa and *Homo atlaicus* in Asia. *Homo atlanticus* was a white, ancient Aryan race that came from Atlantis.

Díaz attributed the construction of the monumental architecture at Tiwanaku to *Homo atlanti-*

cus. Two hundred million years ago, the ancient Aryans migrated west to South America from the original Atlantis across a long-lost land bridge. They settled in the Bolivian Altiplano, which was much different back then. Lake Titicaca was three times larger and the surrounding plain was not windswept and barren. It was lush and tropical, ideal for farming, and abundant in natural resources. *Homo atlanticus* settled in a shallow valley on the southern shore of the lake, where they constructed a magnificent city.

Díaz not only revealed the origins of the ruins, but explained their supposed contrast with Bolivia's present-day indigenous population. By measuring skulls, he argued that the cranial measurements of Bolivian Indians were not consistent with those of *Homo atlanticus*. Rather, the Aymara were descendants of *Homo atlaicus*, barbaric Asians who arrived in a later migration. It was *Homo atlaicus* that conquered the ancient city and named it Tiwanaku.

Díaz's "discoveries" were well received in the elite scientific and political circles of fin-de-siècle La Paz—so well received, in fact, that the government promoted Tiwanaku as the official icon of Bolivia's Centennial celebrations in 1925.

The months leading up to Independence Day were marked by the typical flourish of statues, monuments, and nationalist speeches. The streets were cleaned and the Parisian townhouses lining the stately *calle Montes* were repainted. The President even issued a supreme decree prohibiting Indians from sidewalks and plazas. And when the big day finally came, creole aristocrats could raise their glass in the name of the Republic and toast their ancient ancestors from Tiwanaku, the "primitive metropolis of South American whites."

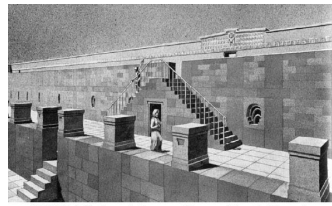


Abb. 34. Schaubild im Inneren der Sonnenwarte Kallasa in Tiwanaku. Rekonstruktion. Auf dem obersten Stufenabsatz das Sonnenkreuz.

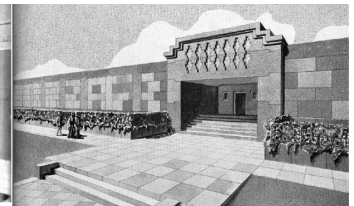


Abb. 36. Schaubild des Ostrvers der Sonnenwarte Kallasa, von außen gesehen. Rekonstruktion.

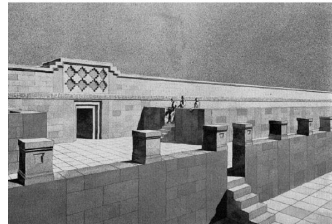


Abb. 35. Schaubild des Ostrvers der Sonnenwarte Kallasa, von innen gesehen. Rekonstruktion.



Abb. 37. Kapittel aus der Kallasa in Tiwanaku.



Abb. 38. Steinkreis aus Tiwanaku, vermutlich aus einem Fels in der Sonnenwarte Kallasa. Phot. Professor Arthur Posnansky in La Paz.

Edmund Kiss' hypothetical reconstructions of Tiwanaku in his book *Das gläserne Meer* (Leipzig, 1930).

BERLIN, 1939.

Whether or not the German writer Edmund Kiss met Díaz Romero during his stay in Bolivia remains uncertain. But Kiss was undoubtedly exposed to his ideas by Arthur Posnansky, a swashbuckling Austrian capitalist, amateur archaeologist, and international gentleman of science. Tiwanaku was Posnansky's enduring obsession. From 1903, the year he settled in Bolivia, to his death in 1946, he published over 130 titles on the site, in four languages.²

What brought Kiss and Posnansky together—and what drew Kiss to Tiwanaku in the first place—was Kiss's commitment to German ethnic nationalism and his obsession with the mythic past. Neither were uncommon in the Weimar Republic. As the Nazi Party expanded during the 1920s and 1930s, right-wing romantic nationalists celebrated an idealized folk culture as the essence of German nationhood.

Though the Nazis didn't come up with the idea of a pure Aryan race, they did invest manpower and invent new knowledge to fill in its history and evolution. Kiss and his fellow Nazi ideologues had a particular weakness for Atlantis. Like Díaz Romero, they too believed that Caucasians had originated in the Lost City. The Nazis took the polygenic fantasy a step further, however; subdividing whites into Semites, the ancestors of the Jews, and

Aryans—an ancient race autochthonous to northern Europe. The Aryan-Atlantis connection occupied a central place in Nazi mysticism and was one of the most popular themes of German science fiction during the 1920s and 1930s.

Where archaeological evidence of Aryan Atlanteans was lacking, an elaborate theory called Glacier Cosmology did the trick. A moon had once collided with Earth, destroying Atlantis and covering the planet with glaciers. What led Kiss to Tiwanaku was his belief that following the cataclysm, survivors of that ancient Nordic civilization took refuge in the high Andes, one of the few places where life was still possible. Kiss found Posnansky while researching the question and in 1928 he set off to Bolivia to study the ruins.

Kiss spent almost a year at Tiwanaku. Always wearing the same long white smock and Panama hat, he carefully surveyed the ruins and their relative position to the sun, stars, and moon. Kneeling, notepad on thigh, he studied the glyphs for meaning, sometimes for hours, seeking clues to the identity of the ancient architects. Day after day in the basement of the National Museum he studied skulls, wondering if the ancient Tiwanakan's elongated crania were artificially deformed, or belonged to a superior Nordic race.

Back in Germany, his work was a wild success. "The works of art and the architectural style of the prehistoric city are certainly not of Indian origin," Kiss had concluded. "Rather they are probably the creations of Nordic men who arrived in the Andean highlands as representatives of a special civilization." Kiss further publicized his finding with a popular tertiary of science fiction novels that chronicled the rise, decline, and ultimate triumph of the ancient Aryans.

Nazi officials seized on Kiss's work and featured the ancient Nordic city of Tiwanaku in party newspapers and Hitler Youth publica-

tions. Kiss was soon put in touch with Heinrich Himmler, leader of the Nazi SS and a principle architect of the Holocaust. In 1935, Himmler had founded a new SS think tank called the Ahnenerbe to conduct social scientific research into the history of the Aryan peoples. So far, he had sent archeological missions to Scandinavia, France, Tibet, and Antarctica in search of the ancient origins of the Aryan race.³

Now he wanted Kiss to lead a trip to Bolivia, to Tiwanaku, the ancient Nordic civilization in the Andes. Working for much of 1938 and 1939, Kiss assembled a crack team of Nazi scientists for the job. Their objective: reveal the presence of the Master Race in prehistoric South America, and dispel, once and for all, the mystery surrounding the Tiwanaku ruins.

The expedition never happened. When Hitler invaded Poland in September 1939, the war took precedence. Kiss, already an officer in the SS, was dispatched to Warsaw, and then took command of Wolfschanze, one of Hitler's military headquarters in East Prussia. In 1945, he surrendered to the Allies and was imprisoned alongside other Nazi war criminals. At the "de-nazification" hearings, Kiss was initially classified a "major offender," but he pleaded for and won the lesser status of "fellow traveler"—on account of his archaeological research. He remained committed to his Atlantis-Tiwanaku thesis until his death in 1960.*



HERE, NOW

Like Kiss, Díaz and Posnansky also died long ago—and their fantastic interpretations of Tiwanaku have since been thoroughly discredited. Nonetheless, their legacy lives on. Popular television series like *Ancient Aliens* and *Secrets of the Dead* continue to explore the Tiwanaku-Atlantis connection. Bestselling books by Erich von Däniken and Graham Hancock

* Kiss continued to promote his Tiwanaku theory of Atlantis in fringe publications such as the *Atlantis Journal* and *New World Antiquity*.

go further, attributing the construction of Tiwanaku to ancient extraterrestrial beings.

Though it may be hard to stomach, the survival of the Atlantis myth is certainly not surprising. Plato's Lost City has proven both timeless and universal in the western imagination. Its timelessness lies in its capacity to reveal the mysteries of human origins; its universal appeal, in its unlimited imaginary potential. And lest we forget: the legend of Atlantis evolved alongside dangerous theories of race that reinforced white supremacy for Aryan nationalists and Bolivian creoles alike. Attributing the construction of Tiwanaku to ancient extraterrestrial beings only perpetuates this nefarious myth. When we wonder if Tiwanaku was built by Atlanteans or by Aliens, those assumptions are based on the same twisted logic that drove men like Díaz, Posnansky, and Kiss: that Andean peoples could not have built Tiwanaku.

And that's the greatest myth of all.



Notes

1. David Grann's recent and hugely popular *Lost City of Z*, for example, downplays the fact that when the British explorer Percy Fawcett disappeared, he wasn't looking for an ancient indigenous city; he was looking for an outpost of Atlantis. *The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon* (London: Vintage, 2010).

2. Daniel Schávelzon found that even the title of Posnansky's magnum opus, *Tiwanaku: Cradle of American Man*, was lifted directly from a line in a Díaz book. See "Arturo Posnansky y la arqueología boliviana: una bio-bibliografía," *Beiträge zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Archäologie*, Vol. 16 (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1996).

3. Thank you to William Patch for sharing this source—and notes!

Stage Excerpt: We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915

Jackie Sibblies Drury

Elsewhere in this issue of *The Appendix*, we interview the writer Jackie Sibblies Drury about her play *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915*, which earned glowing reviews during its recent runs in Chicago and New York. Its plot is this: six black and white American actors attempt to make their own play about the imperial German genocide of the Herero people of South West Africa in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. After a rapid-fire, surprisingly slapstick overview of the history, the play's main body follows the well-meaning but often egotistical actors as they chafe at the primary source that they hoped might inspire their work: a cache of letters sent home by German soldiers.

It does not go well.

Sibblies Drury shared an excerpt of the play with *The Appendix*. In these two scenes, the actors attempt to adapt one of those letters—but then fight about it. The play barrels headlong to a fierce and upsetting conclusion, but in this excerpt, at least, tempers are not so frayed that the play isn't still bitinglly funny. A challenging balance of social criticism, racial violence, and inquiry into how deeply we can empathize with the dead, *We Are Proud to Present* is the breakout contribution of a new voice in American theater. We are grateful to Sibblies Drury for the chance to introduce it to *The Appendix's* readers.

In other words, we are proud to present it.



Characters:

Actor 6 / Black Woman

Actor 1 / White Man

Actor 2 / Black Man

Actor 3 / Another White Man

Actor 4 / Another Black Man

Actor 5 / Sarah

All are young, somewhere in their 20's, ish, and they should seem young, open, skilled, playful, and perhaps, at times, a little foolish.



Scene: Presentation [1896]

WHITE MAN and SARAH are dominant in the presentation.

The letter is filled with Romance and Yearning.

There might be some distant representation of African bodies ... but the love is fore grounded.

WHITE MAN

Dear Sarah.

We awoke before dawn again this morning. And walked, and walked,

And walked until long after dark.

We walk so much even when I sleep

I dream of walking in the heat.

There is so much heat here Sarah.

I saw steam rising from the shoulders of the man in front of me.

It is so hot our very sweat is wrested from our bodies.

I have never experienced such thirst as this.

Dear Sarah, I beg you

for a picture, of you in our garden,

for a picture of you in a cool and living place.

I will hold your picture to my lips and feel refreshed.



Scene: Process

ACTOR 4

Can I ask a question?

ACTOR 6

What is it?

ACTOR 2

Are we just going to sit here and watch some white people fall in love all day?

ACTOR 4

I wasn't going to put it like that—

ACTOR 2

Where are all the Africans?

ACTOR 1

We're just reading the letters.

I'm sure we'll find something that has some more context.

ACTOR 2

I think we should see some Africans in Africa.

ACTOR 1

And I think we have to stick with what we have access to.

ACTOR 2

No no no. This is some

Out-of-Africa-African-Queen-bullshit y'all are pulling right here, OK?

If we are in Africa, I want to see some black people.

ACTOR 6

He's right. We have to see more of the Herero.

ACTOR 4

That's all I was trying to say.

ACTOR 6

We need to see what—

ACTOR 4

We need to see Africa.

ACTOR 2

That's what I'm talking about.

ACTOR 4

You know? These dusty old letters talking about this dusty old place—

ACTOR 2

Yes.

ACTOR 4

I want to see the live Africa.

ACTOR 2

Preach.

ACTOR 4

The Africa that's lush—

ACTOR 2

Um—

ACTOR 4

The Africa that's green

ACTOR 2

Well—

ACTOR 4

With fruit dripping from trees—

ACTOR 6

Dig into it.

ACTOR 2

But the desert—

ACTOR 4

Gold pushing its way out of the ground—

ACTOR 2

That's not—

ACTOR 6

(to ACTOR 2)

Shh—

ACTOR 4

And so many animals—

ACTOR 6

Yes.

ACTOR 4

Monkeys—

ACTOR 6

Yes.

ACTOR 4

Gibbons—

ACTOR 6

Yes.

ACTOR 4

Elephants and giant snakes—

ACTOR 6

Stick with it.

ACTOR 4/ANOTHER BLACK MAN

And I hunt them.

ACTOR 4 adopts an "African" accent. It's not ok.

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

I hunt de lion. I hunt de jagua. I hunt de tiegah.

ACTOR 2

But—

ACTOR 3, 5, 6

Shhh.

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

When I kill a tiegah I eat de heart of the animal while it beats.

"African" Drums begins, slowly, provided by

ACTOR 6.

The beat is felt in a count of 7

(1-2, 1-2, 1-2-3)

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

I push my hands into the animal, breaking apart bone and sinew, until I reach the heart and I pull it toward my heart, feeling the veins stretch and snap, wiping spurts of blood from my face.

By now, ACTORS 1 & 3 & 5, have found the beat also.

Now it starts to grow.

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

I barely have to chew, the heart is tender. I pull a fang from the animal's mouth and add it to my necklace of teeth – another kill, another point of pride, another day I provide for my family. My family—we feast on the best parts of the meat, we feast, and women ululate

ACTOR 5 ululates.

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

and dance with naked breasts

ACTOR 5 performs "African" Dance. Others join.

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

in front of our fire.

And they are all my wives, the women are all my wives

and I take two of them to my bed,

and I fuck both of the wives I took to bed

and I make them both pregnant because we are all as dark and fertile as African jungle soil.

"African" Dance and Drumming and joy. ACTOR 2 breaks in:

ACTOR 2

Y'all need to stop.

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

I have many children. Many Many Children.

ACTOR 2

For real. Just stop.

ACTOR 5

Keep going!

ANOTHER BLACK MAN

Many children that I love.

ACTOR 2

STOP.

They stop.

ACTOR 2

This isn't that kind of Africa.

Ok?

We already Wikipediaed this.

ACTOR 5

Yeah, but—

ACTOR 2

We know it's like desert: dry, hot, arid, barren.

What's he talking about tigers and palm trees

ACTOR 4

I was making the part my own.

ACTOR 2

Oh come on.

ACTOR 5

You don't want us to do anything.

ACTOR 2

You can't make the part your own so much that you ignore what's actually there.

ACTOR 1

That's not what he's saying.

ACTOR 2

Oh really?

ACTOR 1

It's not.

ACTOR 2

So why don't you tell me what he's saying.

ACTOR 5

Why are you always so angry all the time?

ACTOR 2

I know you didn't.

ACTOR 5

What?

ACTOR 4

Guys I know that I don't know everything about the Herero but—

Will you listen? We have to start somewhere.

ACTOR 2

So start by being black.

Beat.

Interview with Jackie Sibblies Drury: The Reenactors

Christopher Heaney

Jackie Sibblies Drury is a playwright. A graduate of Yale and Brown's theater programs, Jackie is the inaugural Jerome New York fellow at The Lark Play Development Center, a recipient of a 2012-2013 Van Lier Fellowship from New Dramatists, a New York Theater Workshop Usual Suspect, and a MacDowell Colony Fellow. She grew up in New Jersey.

In the fall of 2012, her play *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia, Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915* had its New York premiere at Soho Rep, after a praised run at Chicago's Victory Gardens. Glowing-ly reviewed by *The New Yorker*, *We Are Proud to Present* is a work of theater about empathy, acting, and American and African racial history. It centers on six well-meaning actors, three black, three white, who have decided to make a play about the late nineteenth-, early twentieth-century German slaughter of the Herero people—which, as *The New York Times* noted in its review, “has been called the first genocide of the twentieth century.” When the play begins, the actors are muddling through a rapid-fire overview of the history of German imperialism in South Africa, the confiscation of land belonging to the Herero and Nama people to build a railroad, and the German “Extermination Order” laid upon the Herero who tried to survive.

We Are Proud to Present takes a permanent detour, however, never getting to the play the actors hope to stage. Instead, the audience watches the actors rehearse. Sharply funny portraits of theatrical egos give way to arguments over the historical source they've decided to use, a cache of letters sent home by German soldiers. They agonize over whether they can stage a play about a tribal people who left few archival traces, and whether they, as black and white Americans, can authentically play Germans and Herero. And in trying to dig into

their own emotions to do so—their own experience of race and history, profoundly American—their plans go violently, terrifyingly, downriver. Elsewhere in this issue, we've shared an excerpt from one of the play's slightly lighter but only slightly less fraught moments, before things really get dark.

Jackie took the time to discuss *We Are Proud to Present* with Appendix editor Christopher Heaney between writing and rehearsing her new play, *Social Creatures*, in which Providence, RI residents take shelter in a theater during a zombie attack. We were honored by the opportunity.



Christopher Heaney: So when you're at a cocktail party, and somebody asks, ‘What do you do?’—how do you describe your job to them, and the kind of work you've created?

Jackie Sibblies Drury: There's a super-short answer, and then a medium-length answer, and then a really long answer. Normally I just say that I write plays and no one asks any other questions. But sometimes they're like, ‘What kind of plays do you write?’ And then I tend to say that I would be considered someone who writes experimental plays. And then depending on how obnoxious I'm feeling, I say, ‘But what's experimental? I don't really know what that means! And play writing—I don't know what that means either!’

But I guess what I think of myself as trying to do is write text for performance. To me that means that I try to create language that I can use to collaborate with people to talk about an idea, with a different group of people.

CH: How was history taught where you grew up? What was your consciousness of it?

JSD: I think of history as units. I grew up in New Jersey and I went to a small private school where if you studied a unit on Egyptian history you would learn how to make a scarab and write your name in hieroglyphics. You would do a unit on the American Revolution and try to memorize the names of all the battles that happened in New Jersey.

I started realizing that history was something that was dependent, or relative, I guess, in eighth grade in my school. There was a class that was like ‘world cultures or world cultures and civilization,’ and I remember everyone was really excited to take that class because it was the first history class that was one thing for the whole time.

But my class was really disappointed because we had a new teacher who was pretty excited about a book that had just come out: *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. And that was our textbook. This Jackie Sibblies Drury was supposed to be a world cultures class and we just ended up learning about Irish monks copying and recopying the library of Alexandria. And it seemed very ... specific. We thought we were going to be learning about Asia, and India, and Africa, and Europe, but we just concentrated on this one book.

After we went back to programmable sections, I have a very specific memory of being older in high school and talking with my mother, who grew up in Jamaica. I was freaking out about an AP exam and she said, “I’m so glad we didn’t have those when like we were doing Jamaican history.” And I said “How could there be a whole class of Jamaican history?” And then she looked at me like I was crazy, so that was a pretty shameful realization.

So, I have *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, and mock-

ing my mother for having taken a Jamaican history class when she was in high school. Seminal. [Laughs]

CH: Did your mom sit you down and correct you on the Jamaican history? Did she tell you, ‘No, this is worthwhile?’

JSD: No, not really. I think that it wasn’t very important to her. I also think that because of the school that she went to, a lot of Jamaican history was tied up in British history. I’m reading a book right now for this play that I’m working on that’s an ethnography by Zora Neale Hurston about voodoo in Jamaica and Haiti. This is the closest I’ve gotten to reading about Jamaican history, and it’s

this voodoo ethnography, which is pretty crazy.

CH: When did you start to write, as an artist?

JSD: During college I was in theater, and one of the acting classes that we had to take was a solo performance class

with the artist and playwright Deb Margolin, and in that class you had to write pieces about your life that you would have to perform in. She also taught a playwriting class that was separate from that, which I took, but I didn’t spend a lot of time writing creatively until after college, I think. What changed was that I realized that I didn’t actually want to be an actor. I started really trying to write plays, I guess, in my twenties, in New York—not showing them to anybody, but writing them.

CH: Did *We are Proud to Present* start that way?

JSB: That started a little bit later.

I decided to apply to all these playwriting MFA programs, and I quit my job in New York and moved to Chicago and lived with Mark, who’s my husband now, and was getting his masters at the University of Chicago. I was there not having a



nine to five job for the first time in a long time, and when I wasn't applying to different graduate school programs I would also work on various play ideas, and one of them was an idea about this actor who is in a lot of [Rainer Werner] Fassbinder movies. He was this black dude who is the son of an American GI and a German woman, who was born in Germany and speaks German, but in these Fassbinder movies he always plays an American GI and speaks English with a German accent. It's weird, and he has this weird life where basically, yes, he's an actor but he never plays German people because he's black, even though he's German. And I was like, 'That's so interesting!' So then I googled 'Black People in Germany' and I found out about the Herero genocide.

I happened to be at the University of Chicago library, and I was able to do research for free, which was really helpful. I wouldn't have been able to maintain my interest in the material, otherwise. I read these ethnographies from the seventies about the Herero, and all of this stuff about the genocide, and when I went to grad school, and I started *We Are Proud to Present* as my thesis.

CH: How would you describe *We Are Proud to Present* a Presentation About the Herero of Namibia—

JSD: [laughs]

CH: —I'm going to say the whole thing—Formerly Known as South West Africa, From the German Sudwestafrika, Between the Years 1884-1915? I mean, just from the title, you can tell that it's a play that's literally bursting at the edges. Is that partly what the title's about?

JSD: At the center of the play is a relatively simple action: Glancing at a picture of a Herero person that was wrongfully killed by the German government and, for a second, seeing the image of a black person being lynched by a mob in the American South; seeing one history or one image of something that happened and projecting another image, a closer association, over it.

But building up to and examining that split second is what gets really complicated. Why is that history so much more accessible for Americans? Why are Americans so bad at knowing anything

At the center of the play is a relatively simple action: seeing one history or one image of something that happened and projecting another image, a closer association, over it.

about anyone that's not American—or even American history? And it's also about peoples' inability to talk about race in any way that's not cloying or offensive. It just mushrooms out from this accident.

CH: You ease people into it, though. The title has an almost Wes Anderson cuteness, in the way that it sends up titles of academic history (which almost always have at least two dates). The actors then begin the performance with an awkward lecture about a past that most Americans know nothing about, delivered in a slapstick way that lulls the audience, even though it's a history of genocide. How did you come upon the idea of starting this play so self-consciously? And what does that do?

JSD: I first tried to write a more straightforward play about the genocide. Because I found that so difficult it led to this idea of a group of actors failing to make a piece about the genocide. I also realized that early in a traditional play, you have really painful moments of exposition, where people say things like 'Oh, have you seen Bill? He's thirty-four years old today! He's exactly one year older than his father when he died!' And you're like, 'OK, you're giving me all this information, and I know this is going to be important later ... Ugh.'

I didn't want to have moments like that, like 'Oh, the Herero! They're a tribe!' I wanted everyone to know about the genocide already, so that we're in-

stead talking about how we're thinking about it. So as a sort of as a joke to myself, I thought, 'Well it would be really great to have a lecture at the top of the play to teach some basics. Or if everyone could pull up the Wikipedia article and read it really fast and then the play could start.'

But I started getting bogged down because I'm not a historian and I don't feel comfortable speaking with a lot of authority about something that I don't really know anything about. I realized that I wanted the simplest, least authoritative description possible ... and so it took the form of a student presentation. I was in grad school at a really great school where really educated undergraduates would be asked to describe really difficult things. But whenever they touched on cultural studies, or race, or other things that make us uncomfortable, these students' presentations would either become really ironic and removed and silly, or would latch on to a dry, super-earnest and politically correct script of how we've been taught to talk about it. That means that no one ever says anything new; and we have no personal connection to what we're saying. At all. I mean, 'Black History is great. Frederick Douglass, he's a really smart guy.' And that's like all you say.

I don't know why I'm picking on Frederick Douglass. Great hair, that guy.

So I realized that in talking about the Herero it became necessary to talk about race in general, because from the vantage point of an American audience it is really hard to talk about Africa and not imprint American racial dynamics onto it.

CH: The play foregrounds race from the beginning. Instead of giving your characters names, you label them in the script as Black Woman, White Man, Black Man, Another White Man, Another Black Man, and White Woman (who sometimes gets called Sarah). Is their lack of names an attempt to make their personalities less necessary for the audience? Or is that a feint? Because it becomes clear that these are specific people coming from a very specific racial history ...

JSD: Knowing so little about the genocide and not knowing the name of things are tropes in the play, and I wanted that to continue into the character

names.

I also wanted to have the performers—the real performers performing the actors in the room—remove character from their portrayal. A very traditional approach to creating a character is where you separate from yourself, and you say, 'Oh, I'm playing this guy named Timmy, for breakfast he had Wheaties, his backpack has a Led Zeppelin CD in it, and, oh, a comb that's missing some of the teeth.' You create all of these very specific traits and ticks and backstory so that you can embody this thing that is not you.

I was much more interested in having the performers working on the play mold the circumstances that were required for the play to function onto themselves, if that makes sense. There is an inevitability to any sort of play; I mean, you have to get to the end to do the play. And it was an interesting idea to me to use the inevitability, to have the only essential part of the play be the race and gender of the people, and that with the race and gender that these people talking about this thing in this room together have, they are going to end up in the place they're going to end up in the play.

CH: So after their awkward sprint through forty years of German colonialism and genocide, these nameless actors break into a rehearsal space where they discuss the source that their leader, the Black Woman, is trying to build the play around: a set of letters from German soldiers writing home from Südwestafrika.

Why did you center this first half of the play on these letters? And are they real? Or did you create them for the play?

JSD: I'm embarrassed to admit that I didn't look at any letters, at all. [Laughs] I imagine that they existed because in the sources that I was looking at there was mention of soldiers going back and forth, so I imagined that there would be letters. But I did not make any effort to locate or read them at all. The letters came from my attempt to do research. I became super-aware that all the sources I was reading were based on a European vantage on the situation. One of the closest-to-being-first-person African sources that I had was something called *The Blue Book*, or really an annotated reprint

of that book, which was put out by the British government during World War One. It was sort of a pamphlet made up of interviews with Herero and Nama people that had made it to British South Africa. Sort of like a policy paper. But policy paper isn't really the right word, because to me it read as propaganda, like anti-German propaganda, a way to talk about how morally corrupt and monstrous the German people were during World War One. So the least biased source was actually a super-biased source, and I felt the impossibility of actually getting the Herero's story. It pointed at this thing that's an issue in a lot of disciplines, which is how to adequately represent a culture that doesn't keep records in the same way as our culture. I got really interested in the idea that the only thing these actors had were these letters, the history written by the victors, literally, and Wikipedia. It felt relatively accurate that a group of people who'd read one article about the genocide would find something dusty and old and unrelatable, and the Internet.

CH: But they're already chafing at using them, as they're almost entirely focused on the soldiers' relationship with their girls back home, and only negligibly about the Herero. The actors try these different ways of getting around that erasure, and those white romantic fantasies of Africa. At one point a romantic German letter gets read out loud while the Black Man and Black Woman act out a relationship between a Herero man and woman atop of it. And it feels genuinely touching, but also ... complicated. How did you come up with that scene?

JSD: After committing to the conceit of the letters. I was excited for [the scene] because it lit-

erally is a seduction for the actors too. It's both the one moment that adds a tiny bit of romance to the play—because there's otherwise nothing romantic about it!—as well as the moment when the 'blending' first happens. Where they say 'I, as a black American actor, can imagine what it is like to be an African Herero who is in love with a Herero African woman, because love is universal.'

It's an act of empathy that should be a good thing—and is, generally—except that the other side of empathy is erasure. It can be removing the interior life of the person you're empathizing with and substituting your own. And it's more dangerous when you do that on a larger scale, culturally.

CH: You push that point. At one point, the Black Man later calls out the letters as "Out of Africa African Queen bullshit." It's a funny, great critique, but then it pushes on to a really uncomfortable moment, where the other black male actor does his own very stereotyped version of an "authentic" African man. And as you put it in the stage notes, "It's not OK." This isn't just a play about white colonial fantasies about Africa.

JSD: I don't think that white Americans are alone in not knowing very much about Africa. [Laughs] And this is where I maybe get into trouble—and this is less specifically in the play perhaps—but I think there is a bourgeois African-American idealization of Africa that is also funny. It's also in the way that the play is cast. Another Black Man is the one that has this monologue where he becomes African in a very stereotypical and ultimately pretty offensive way. That character generally is an Other kind of black man. He's either physically smaller, or just hipstery-er, or somehow 'less black' in a way. So when his language becomes super sexualized and he talks about how dark his skin is, and all this stuff, he's like reaching into both a strange nightmare version of a different culture that he doesn't understand and generalizes, and a different version of how he is perceived or wants to be. A different version of blackness. Which I think is ... interesting. A lot of the weirdest portrayals of Africans that I saw growing up were created by African Americans. I think the best example is *Coming to America* (1988) with Eddie Murphy. I still love that movie, but it's insane. And

'It's an act of empathy that should be a good thing—and is, generally—except that the other side of empathy is erasure.'

it's created by this African-American performer. It's interesting.

CH: Did you know that your play would be as ... well, I was going to say as funny as it is, but I've never actually seen it, only read it. Do people laugh?

JSD: People laugh sometimes. No, People laugh! Some people ... It's funny. It depends. In the different productions people have laughed in different places, in different ways. It is a play where there will be some people who think that it's super funny and crack up and some people get really annoyed by the first half because they are offended by the humor and so they don't laugh at all and judge everyone for laughing. Which is also really interesting and works really well when the play shifts and the actors attempt to be more authentic in their roles. They do all these things you're supposed to do as an actor—putting more of themselves in their roles, but by making it more specific they end up talking more about race in America than a genocide in Africa. And the play becomes less funny.

Or the laughter becomes one of recognition. One of the biggest laugh lines, strangely, is in the middle of an argument about documentation and genocide, and the white actress has a line where she says "It's not like the Holocaust." And that makes some people in the audience cry with laughter because it's so familiarly tone deaf. Having the humor go that way in the second half of the play gets us towards recognizing ourselves in the characters. Which is ultimately pretty important to me.

CH: It's the issue of empathy again. There's a key moment a third in, where actor 6, the Black Woman, is talking about looking at the picture of a Herero woman and thinking about family, her grandmother, and African heritage. And while that's going on you have the other actors fighting over who can best play the Black Woman's grandmother, and one of the White male actors 'wins.' Within that moment we have the play's first actual violence—where this white male actor, in character as a black grandmother, hits one of the black male actors. And then he tells the Black Woman actor that she can't walk in other people's shoes.

Reading it, you cringe, because he's in all but black face—

JSD: —in terms of the character—

CH: —but it's a moment that is working at so many levels. You have the black actor talking about empathy and identifying with the Herero and starting the play because of it, while you have the white actor—I don't know, making a mockery of that?

JSD: I really like that moment because it's such a multilayered kind of irony. Both actors that have played the Another White Man character have done this very neat thing where over the course of that scene they take that black grandmother to a place that feels less stereotypical. Which is insane, but for the scene to succeed, the white actor playing the grandmother must say something that is very true in that moment.

CH: 'You can't walk in other people's shoes.' That there's that danger in empathy. It's not just a limit to understanding what other people are, but also 'Do you understand yourself? And where you're coming from?'

JSD: Yeah. Exactly that. And that it's hard to even understand yourself, because the way you are, or how you are, is made up of so many things, is so complex. Being able to empathize with someone's story is pretending that their life is a linear thing that could be understood. There's so much that goes into understanding someone else's situation. It's very complicated.

CH: I feel like you're doing things here with theater that history struggles with. There's plenty of theory on how historians and anthropologists studying interestingly foreign peoples are often studying their own assumptions. But what theater can do is take on that criticism and act it through to a more emotional and universal question standing outside history: how can we empathize with anyone honestly?

JSD: I have learned that I am not an academic. I am really bad at coming up with a thesis. Or coming up with a question and answering it. The thing that I love about trying to write plays is that in the-

ater you have the luxury of not having to have one thesis. Instead you can have a matrix of questions. Most plays that I like don't really answer any of them. You're able to bandy ideas about without offering a resolution or a conclusion. It's an exciting way to engage really big questions, I think, if you don't have the pressure of concluding 'Well, empathy ... is a good thing. Or a bad thing.' So I can let myself off the hook.

CH: Do you think the actors within your play knew how *their* play was going to end?

JSD: Ah! I think—I have no idea. I have never thought about that. That's so funny. I think that they didn't think about the ending of the show, but I think that they assumed that after they ended it, people would rise to their feet and applaud their good work at making a play about such an important thing. I think that that's what they were thinking about. I have no idea how they think the play would end.

CH: Like they're trying to push towards this ringing endorsement of recovery of this horrible event, and congratulations to them for having done it? In a way that's really earnest and well meant, but you know—

JSD: Yeah, because—I didn't mean to interrupt—but I don't think that that's a bad thing, I think that all the actors in the play are good people. I think they all have better intentions than a lot of people that are doing things. They all want to create; they all think that this is a story that is important; they're all interested in educating the audience. These are admirable qualities. And so I have a lot respect for them.

CH: Did you know when you started—and we're dancing around it—how the play would end? Because the play that the actors are trying to rehearse *does not* end up in a 'happy' place. It's hard to imagine audiences meeting its final moments with anything but horror. As an intro to talking about it, do you want to give a little summary?

JSD: I'd be curious to see how you'd summarize it!

CH: Well—and this is going to have heavy spoilers, but—over the course of the play the actors, in

their attempts to find emotional ways in to their Herero-German improvisations, start drawing from U.S. history. Particularly that of the American south, white racism, slavery, and Jim Crow. In the end, all of the actors make a last push to get at the intensity of the Herero genocide but what comes out is a horrific Jim Crow musical number that culminates in some very real violence against one of the black male actors. Any pretense of representing the Herero is dropped, and the actors, white and black, act out what feels like an American passion play of lynching, fear, and the torture of black bodies. The actors are only shaken out of it when the white actors place a noose around the Black Man's neck, and the Black Man breaks character, just before the worst happens. You're clear in the stage directions that all of the violence is real, so when we reach that moment, the stakes feel different.

I'd be curious to know how audiences feel when they're going through it. I'd be curious to know how the actors feel going through it, whether anyone can talk to each other after the play. Because it goes off the rails in the worst of ways, which is what's amazing for the drama. I don't mean that it shouldn't be going in that direction. But it goes there.

JSD: Yeah. For the most part ... it feels like there's some sort of train going on some sort of path, and there's a curve and the train keeps on going straight. The moment asks a lot of the performers. It asks ... It's hard to do. It's hard to get to the place that it needs to get to.

I feel so indebted to the director I've been working with, Eric Ting, because there's something super-meta-theatrical in that moment. It forces the director of the show to force the performers to go to a place where they are uncomfortable—which is what happens to the characters in the play. I've been lucky enough to work with some amazing and really professional people, but the days in rehearsal when we actually put that part on its feet ... are dark days. Generally someone cries. Generally someone gets upset. Or into some sort of argument about it. Which is appropriate. Which feels right.

There's something also in it that's ... I think that it's a hard scene for everyone. It's hard for everyone in different ways and it's hard in racially specific ways. Which makes it hard to rehearse, I think. It's also hard because it's asking the white actors to be incredibly ugly, and ugly in a way that no one I have worked with has felt comfortable being. They have to say the most racist stuff of the play, and say it as a joke, which makes it uglier ... but both the actors in the play and the performers performing it are doing that out of the best intentions, which is also complicated. I think that I tell the performers that they have to perform it in a horrifying enough way that it will shock the audience into the horror of empathizing with an experience that's really familiar to some black people. Which is, I think, a really noble goal.

How audiences have reacted to it has been really varied. The way that we performed it in New York was that the audience comes into the theater space, and it's like a black box, like a rehearsal room, and the audience members have to set up their own chairs around the edges of the space. That was important to Eric because he thought that it would be really good to have the audience have a sense of agency early on. And to sustain that agency, we had this very complicated system for how the play ended. But the audience's reaction was always different. Sometimes people were upset, visibly affected. There was one night where people were checking their cell phones before all the actors had left the stage. And so I think it really depends. I think that it can be a very affecting experience. But I think people respond to that in different ways. Some people shut down and leave right away and some people ... don't.

CH: So much depends on whether the audience is willing to get into that last emotional space. That last section isn't just action, but full-on spectacle: choreography, singing, music. Were you trying to overwhelm the audience's ability to analyze, trying to turn off their consciousness, or were you trying to push awareness?

JSD: I think it was sort of the former. I wanted the moment to feel really huge and overwhelming but then the other aspect of it was that I, like, I wanted—and this sounds horrible—but I wanted it to actually feel like a lynching. Like I wanted it to be

like a sort of spiritual lynching. And so I thought that the way to have that happen in a theater and involve that audience in it—to have the most theatrical interpretation or translation of how I imagine the atmosphere at an actual lynching was—to give it this rhythm, this beat, that makes some people in the audience tap their foot to it, or shake their head to it. There's seven beats to the measure in the music of it, so it feels like it's always jumping forward. It's really a driving, primal moment. And I think that the musicality of it, the strong rhythms of it, is also perversely inviting. You sort of want them to stop but you also want to encourage them. To have the feeling that it's going to keep going. That if you catch the rhythm ... you catch the rhythm, I guess.

CH: Have you seen audience members nodding their head and tapping their feet?

JSD: Yeah. And then being not happy about it. Not consciously. Watching and having their bodies move, because the rhythm of it lasts for five minutes. You can sort of see people being drawn into it.

CH: Have you ever paid attention to the audience when the music stops, and the black actors asks to get the noose off of him? Does the feeling change within the theater? I can't imagine that it doesn't.

JSD: It's always different. The black actor that has a noose around him storms out, and the Black Woman actor goes after him, and while people are very focused on that, the racial dynamics of the actors left on stage shifts. When two of the black actors leave, the third becomes less visible and less present. And then it's sort of like the three white actors in the space, alone. And I feel like the

'for some people, I think, there's a slight sense of relief at not having to look at a black person anymore.'

audience at that moment ... there's a lot going on. In some ways, for some people, I think, there's a slight sense of relief at not having to look at a black person anymore. But for some people, the people that were very emotionally affected by the previous moment, there's also a sense of relief at having it stop, having it not keep going. There's been some people who have said that if it had kept escalating and escalating and escalating, they would have walked out. It was getting to the point of discomfort where they didn't want to do it anymore.

There have been alternate endings after the ending, especially in graduate school, where someone had this big monologue and all this stuff. But after the lynching, I think that people generally want the play to be over. There are non-verbal things that happen after that, but the play doesn't ask you to take any more language in. It just sort of asks you to sit in your reaction long enough to react to it—and sort of deal with watching the actors react to it. And that hopefully allows you to feel your actual reaction, I guess.

It's a super ambiguous moment. It's scary hard when you're dealing with something as sensitive as race. People aren't used to ambiguity in dialogues about race, I think.

CH: It's not just the lack of words in that last moment. The play's objects also do a lot of work. The actors start with what they think is going to be their source, the German letters, and they talk about it, and deconstruct it, but in the course of doing that they create their own sources and objects, which the other black male actor is left to clean up at the end of the play. A crumpled cup thrown down in a moment of anger. The noose. Empty bottles of water. And the white paper mask, which I wanted to ask about.

To give a little background on it: during that final Jim Crow climax one of the white male actors takes, I don't know, it could be a piece of their script, or it could be one of the German letters, but a white piece of paper and he turns it into a mask with holes for eyes and a mouth. And then he places it over one of the black male actors' face and begins to speak for him. And it's this horrifying moment of beyond blackface, whiteface, that's just... there's so much being said by it—if

it is the German letter—about sources and who's talking through them. But it's also just terrifying. Where did that image come from?

JSD: To me, it was going back to what the letters meant at all. It's important to me that the piece of paper that becomes a mask ... it's gone back and forth: it's either supposed to be one of the German letters, or, in this last production of it, there's an earlier moment in the play where the actors move everything around and push all of this stuff on stage to one side of the space. And in that moment, the way that Eric the director staged it, they also throw around copies of the extermination order, which is what the German general Otto von Trotha created to ... Yeah, the extermination order. I don't need to explain that. But in this last production it was the extermination order that was put over his face. And those two things mean different things, obviously, but initially the idea for it came from, not to say the same cliché again, but 'History is written by the victors.' When I was reading the sources that I was reading, there felt like there was a white voice parroting a black perspective. So theater's all about images and I just wanted to create that image, of what that kind of misrepresentation is, in a very stark way.

CH: That mask is one of the reasons that I think that, wherever this play goes, historians need to see it with their students. Whether they're teaching world history or U.S. history. That will be in the interview, that's your plug.

JSD: [Laughs]

CH: So where is the play going now? Could you ever see it going to South Africa or Namibia, or Germany?

JSD: There's a strong possibility that there will be some production of it in Great Britain and in Germany. There was a reading at the English Language Theater in Berlin, which is a pretty awesome theater, and I have no idea how it was cast. I have no idea if there were any black people in it. I really hope so. The play is so specifically American, so it's funny to think about what it would be like with different actors from a different place. I have no inroads to any theaters in South Africa, but I would really love to do this play there and have

a conversation about it. Whenever I talked with people who were either Herero, who had come to see the play, or from Africa, they had a very interesting perspective and were really engaged with it. So I would love to do the play sort of anywhere in Africa. To do exactly what the characters do: 'Anywhere in Africa would be great! It's all the same to me!'

Specifically doing it in South Africa seems logistically more likely, but I would be really excited to go to Namibia with it. But there are other productions in the works, and I'm excited to know that it will definitely happen again, with different casts and different designers. To see how it will change, with different actors.

CH: I have one last question. What does it feel like for you when you get to the end of the play? You talked about the actors doing a very noble thing in taking on this extraordinary ugliness, one of the worst parts of American history, and how it haunts us, even as we try and understand the genocides and violence elsewhere. But you yourself, having lived with the play for so long, is there a cumulative effect of going through it? There's the excitement of other people getting to see the play, but I guess I'm asking 'Is there also an emotional exhaustion?'

JSD: I feel ... I had to stop going to see the play when it was New York. Even though it was happening every night. Both play processes that I've been involved in, with **We Are Proud to Present**, have been so important, and I've learned so much about the play and about theater in general but I also ... I have wanted to be emotionally available to my collaborators. And that's kind of exhausting to me and—this is gross—but at the end of seeing the play with an audience I would get up and realize that I was drenched in sweat. I would sit there, so incredibly nervous, incredibly embarrassed, and incredibly anxious for the performers ... it became kind of unpleasant. I like the emotional exhaustion of working on it. But watching it and being past the place where I can change a line, or talk to the director Eric, or do anything ... just sort of watching it, I think is... it is kind of unbearable. But I think that's good, I think that it's doing something, and it's still working on me. I don't want to get to a point where I see it and I'm not nervous or embarrassed by it.

'I don't want to get to a point where I see it and I'm not nervous or embarrassed by it.'

The Woman in Green: A Chinese Ghost Tale from Mao to Ming, 1981-1381

Maggie Greene

1981

The film begins on a darkened set, billowing with fog, echoing with a woman's cry to the heavens. Her figure comes into view and she zigs and zags across the screen, her diaphanous white robe glittering with silver fringe. Long sleeves accentuate her swirling, flowing movements, the special mark of Chinese opera singers portraying ghost characters.

From the distance of three decades, it's hard to understand why the 1981 film *Li Huiniang* was so

popular with Chinese audiences. The shape of the film's story was familiar, true: a ghost tale told in China for six hundred years or more. But to contemporary eyes, its surface now seems crowded and cheapened by the special effects that the Shanghai film studio piled onto it. Fog, flashbacks, and visual tricks made literal what earlier versions of *Li Huiniang*, a traditional Chinese opera, had often left to the imagination. However, there is no doubt that the story of a tragic Song dynasty (960-1279 CE) concubine, the titular *Li Huiniang*, who returns from the dead after being unjustly slain by a corrupt prime minister, still found favor with audiences. This was a haunting ghost.¹

Past productions of *Li Huiniang*, at least in the People's Republic of China (PRC), had always been performed onstage, without the aid of special effects. Actors made do with elaborate costumes, fire breathing, colorful face paint, and spectacular acrobatics. Traditional Chinese theatre is austere to the extreme: outside of the exquisite costumes and elaborate makeup, stages are bare, and a set of conventions replace props and sets. Often, the audience is expected to conjure the particulars of a scene in their heads. Actresses gesture to empty stages while singing of lush gardens and gilded pavilions. The horse a general rides is symbolized by a fringed horsehair whip. One set of table and chairs can set a thousand scenes. It is a world away from movie sets, multiple takes and fog machines.

In spite of those differences—and perhaps because of them—*Li Huiniang* took Chinese screens by storm. In this new celluloid version, the actress Hu Zhifeng, playing the title character, danced, sang, and posed her way through



Poster for the 1981 film *Li Huiniang*.
Maggie Greene

effects that rippled around her. Hu's performance has aged beautifully, and it's tempting to pin the film's success on her star-turn, and not the audience's excitement at an old story made new.

To do so, though, ignores the story itself and the ghost that Hu Zhifeng portrayed: Li Huiniang. Hers was a story that had been worked and reworked since the fourteenth century. There was something about this tale of a concubine, unjustly slain by a corrupt prime minister, which appealed to audiences over centuries. In the early 1980s, however, her allure may have rested in her past of the last twenty years. *Li Huiniang* was more than just China's glittering literary and dramatic history. The story's triumphant return embodied the hope that other more recent specters of the past were dead and gone.

1980

For most of us, ghosts are little more than paper cutouts trotted out in October, or stories told around an isolated campfire. They are memories of childhood frights and bogeymen lurking in closets at bedtime. They are things without substance.

They have been a far more adult matter throughout Chinese history, however. Tales centered on ghosts are treasured within the Chinese literary canon, and some of the most beloved operas feature ghosts, come back to warn the living, find love, or exact vengeance. Sometimes, they are the shades of young women who have died for want of a dream lover. Other times, they are avenging spirits of men cut down in their prime. They may be restless souls, hungry ghosts who have no descendants to offer them the appropriate rites. And with the ascension of the Communist Party in 1949, ghosts became an even more serious affair: feudal holdovers and literary traditions to be stamped out with all possible haste.

In 1980, a woman named Meng Jian recalled the pain of standing in front of her father's ashes. Writing a postscript to the republication of a play written by her father, Meng Chao (1902-1976), she poured out her rage. She directed her internal fury not at Mao Zedong or his wife, Jiang Qing—one of the faces of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

that had plunged China into years of chaos and upheaval. Instead, she cursed Li Huiniang, the concubine her father had reinterpreted. The cries of a grieving daughter echoed the cries of the ghost she cursed. "It's all because of wanting to write *you*, having written *you* that it's come to such an end. You are an ancient, immortal ghost—you can become a celestial immortal, but my father is a new ghost, and that fact is extremely hard to swallow, it is an extraordinary injustice!"

1976

Unlike literary ghosts, most people die in far more pedestrian circumstances. Meng Jiang's father, Meng Chao, a good old revolutionary with reasonably impressive literary and party credentials, died alone in a small Beijing flat, according to some stories. His old friend Lou Shiyi, a well-known essayist, wrote in 1979 of his friend's last days:

Meng Chao was all alone, and he had to ask an old granny in the *hutong* to cook for him. I went to go see him when I had time—he was alone, reading *Selected Works of Chairman Mao*. All of his books had been confiscated, only this one book was left. Sometimes, he'd lean on his walking stick and come to my house to borrow novels ... Some days after he had come to borrow a volume of [Nikolai] Gogol's writings, I heard suddenly that Meng Chao had died. They didn't say what big illness he'd had. The *hutong* granny who cooked him food knocked on his door early in the morning; when he didn't answer, she had to open the door and go in. She looked, and Meng Chao was lying on his bed, blood trickling from his nose, dead. At that time, the 'Gang of Four' [Jiang Qing's clique] was still in power, so several friends had to carry his remains on their shoulders to take him to be cremated—in the end, he never got to see the 'Gang of Four' fall from power; he just wore his [bad element] cap and 'went to see Marx.'

His daughter claimed that her father's last words to her were "The injustice!" It was just one death of many, and a reasonably peaceful one at that. But how had it come to this? Why did Meng Chao, a dedicated party member of over forty years, die a lonely death in a Beijing apartment, crying that he had been wronged? How had he died "wearing a bad element cap," suffering in the shadow of be-

ing branded a *niuguai-sheshen*—an ox ghost-snake spirit, the worst of the very worst?²

There are many beautiful women in historical tales who are swept up in the midst of great events. Helen of Troy “launched a thousand ships.” The Tang consort Yang Guifei was blamed for a rebellion. Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church for his bewitching Anne Boleyn. Mao had Jiang Qing, his wife who stepped into political prominence in 1964, after years of being excluded from the political stage. And then there was Meng Chao’s—beautiful Li Huiniang, with the blood-stained face. She was the ghost whose downfall, along with Meng Chao, marked the beginning of Mao’s last great assault on his party.

1965-1969

In writing of the Cultural Revolution, most historians—as well as many participants—mark its “prelude” as the November 1965 publication of an essay criticizing a famous drama (also published in 1961) called *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*. The play, written by the deputy-mayor of Beijing, was based on the true story of one upright official of the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The essay criticizing it, carefully orchestrated by Jiang Qing and other radicals, may have led to the formal launch of the Cultural Revolution, but it was hardly the first spark. That honor belonged to Meng Chao and his lovely ghost, Li Huiniang, the kindling that allowed those early fires to burn so brightly. In the first six months of 1965, it was in fact Meng Chao and his ghost who faced severe criticism in the pages of leading journals and papers. Li Huiniang had faced the ire of cultural radicals since 1963, even inspiring a ban on portraying ghosts in theater—the harbinger of the PRC’s swiftly increasing radicalization of culture and politics.

What harm could there be in telling the tale of a ghost, or of an upright official? The cultural radicals, ready to remake the party in their own image by tearing the establishment down, claimed that the plays proved their authors’ bourgeois spirit, their individualist leanings, their anti-party, anti-socialist thoughts. They were poisonous weeds, evidence of the sickness the Chinese Communist Party still harbored, a sickness that needed to be excised as quickly as possible, by any means nec-

essary. Historical settings were dangerous, for it was never “history for history’s sake,” as men like Wu Han liked to claim. There was a long tradition in China of indirect remonstrance, the use of historical parables to criticize an emperor or high official. It was clear, or so claimed the essays attacking Meng Chao, Wu Han, and the dramatist Tian Han, that these authors, senior members of the intellectual establishment, were using their significant literary and academic chops to bring about their own bourgeois, capitalist goals. They were class enemies, and they were not people, but ox ghosts-snake spirits.

And so the writer of a ghost became a ghost himself. The essayist Lou Shiyl wrote that the period preceding the formal declaration of the Cultural Revolution was a time of great anxiety for everyone. “For a short while, a ghostly atmosphere flickered, and we saw ghosts everywhere. Everyone was afraid of ghosts, deathly afraid.” Meng Chao himself was certainly very frightened, and had good reason to be.

By many measures, the fact that Meng Chao died alone in a Beijing hutong, blood trickling from his nose, was “lucky.” Compared to friends who had been publicly humiliated, thrown in prison, and left to die, a quiet death at home was perhaps a more fortunate death.³

It was not the fate Meng Chao wanted for himself, however. In the late 1960s, he attempted suicide. Though rushed to the hospital, the doctors refused to treat him until the officials handling his case arrived. The question the doctors asked was simple: “Is this a person you want or not?” The handlers responded: “This person is a big traitor, and you mustn’t allow him to die!” At which point treatment commenced.

1961

Four years before the first serious criticisms of his work—a universe away in the Mao years—Meng Chao was the toast of Beijing’s artistic world. Li Huiniang premiered to high praise from all quarters, charming the intellectual and political elite of the day. At the Northern Kun Opera troupe premiere, another senior writer turned to Lou Shiyl

and said of Meng Chao, “Look at that, an old tree starting to bloom.”⁴

The Li Huiniang that stepped out on the Beijing stage that day must have been every bit as dazzling as Hu Zhifeng’s film extravaganza. The audience would have sympathized with the lovely concubine of the prime minister Jia Sidao, killed for a few quiet words uttered in admiration of the handsome young scholar Pei Yu—‘What a courageous youth! What a handsome youth!’ And they surely must have appreciated her strength of character, her bravery after death. Instead of thinking only of herself, she worried over the fate of China’s people, suffering under the policies of Jia Sidao. She was going to be a “ghost bodhisattva,” come to offer succor to a suffering people. The overwhelmingly positive reaction to the play must have delighted a man who had skirted at the edges of fame, but had never truly been a literary star.

The script was a lovely throwback to the great Chinese dramas of centuries past. Its language is exquisitely literary, showing off the author’s grasp of and appreciation for what many intellectuals and artists described as their “inheritance.” In the script itself, there is no pretense of being aimed at the proletariat, the workers, peasants, and soldiers that Mao (and Lenin before him) had declared to be artists’ true audience. The play’s prologue, a common feature for traditional drama, laid out Meng Chao’s intellectual interests and the bare outlines of the plot:^{*}

Crossing the river to the south, the mountains are rugged,
The dissolute still hold sway in Lin’an.
In a bamboo hut, I am fond of reading ‘discourses on ghosts,’
My intentions and energy link to a long rainbow,
My vigorous brush punishes treacherous officials.
Drawing from the wisdom of my predecessors,
I express my own humble views,
And give the old play *Red Plum* a new turn.

I have carefully studied the tender emotions of youths, the feelings of personal enmity.
I write of a flourishing dream being cut off,
I write of northern horses neighing at the banks of the Qiantang.
Jia Sidao endangers the state and harms the people, but there is music and song at evening banquets;
His smile hides a dagger, and a chance for murder appears;
Pei Shunqing, indignant, speaks bluntly—the source of his misfortune,
Pleasing the hearts of people, extending righteous justice,
Li Huiniang is a heroic spirit after death, avenging injustice!

* Mao said that “to study Marxism” does “not mean writing philosophical lectures into our works of literature and art,” but true Marxism necessitated destroying art and culture: “Marxism definitely destroys creative moods that are feudal, bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, liberalistic, individualist, nihilist, art-for-art’s sake, aristocratic, decadent or pessimistic, and every other creative mood that is alien to the proletariat. So far as proletarian writers and artists are concerned, should not these kinds of creative moods be destroyed? I think they should; they should be utterly destroyed. And while they are being destroyed, something new can be constructed.” Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art,” in Kirk Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996): 481.

For Mao's China, however, such opening notes were provocative. Meng Chao styles himself as a solitary scholar of the type found in famous classical poems, hardly an image we associate with socialist art. And he writes of the waning days of the Song dynasty, imperial scholars and enslaved beauties—subject matter far from Mao's pronouncements on art. The play hinted that ghosts, emperors, and scholars were appropriate artistic subjects for a socialist society.

Meng Chao and others took the issue seriously, debating in journals and newspapers, and writing scripts and novels and poems. 1961 was an unusually open period. Mao Zedong was in retreat, the country was stabilizing, and artistic politics were less extreme—a space in which senior, liberal intellectuals and politicians could enjoy classical culture. Taking that chance, Li Huiniang was a clear declaration that classical works and classical language still had purpose and relevance. Art was not—and should not—be about destroying a creative tradition, no matter how lacking in revolutionary credentials it may have been. Meng Chao was reaching back to what he and others saw as their birthright.

Yet the Li Huiniang that he imagined became a fierce woman warrior after death, demanding justice not simply for her own humiliating end at the hands of Jia Sidao, but for the people—the People—he was hurting. Taken generously, it was as if Meng Chao was suggesting that China's cultural

birthright was still compatible with socialism.

But why a ghost? Why this ancient ghost? Why Li Huiniang? And what other lurking ghosts, new ghosts, hungry ghosts was she avenging?

1959

There is a much-loved plot structure in Chinese drama, one put to great use by countless authors over the centuries, particularly in times of trouble. It goes something like this:

It is a time of great crisis for China, a period when peasants break under the strain of government pressure and foreign armies agitate on the borders. A cruel or impressively incompetent ruler is in power, a person who cares for little but his own pleasure. At best, he ignores pressing political issues and the unhappiness of his people; at worst, he makes the lives of the people worse through draconian punishments and inhuman land requisitions and taxation. Weak and corrupt lackeys and subordinates surround him. But there is somebody—there is always at least one person—who finally stands up to him. It may be an official with a sharply honed sense of right and wrong, or perhaps a gutsy young scholar who burns with righteous fury. And sometimes there is an innocent bystander who meets a gruesome, unjust end.

Senior intellectuals in China found sudden inspiration in such classical tales after the party leadership scripted a crisis of still more tragic proportions. In 1957, Mao Zedong announced that the PRC would overtake the United Kingdom in steel production within fifteen years. The Great Leap Forward was to be a leap not just into industrialization and collectivization, but towards superiority in all areas of life, including the realms of science, literature and art. This was a tall order, and Mao needed more than factories for it to come true: he needed capital, and lots of it. As was so often the case, the vision was built on the peasant's back, through the sale of grain on international markets.

The Leap began in 1958. It immediately fell into exuberance and sheer fantasy. Local cadres over-reported harvests to their higher ups, who then reported slightly more inflated numbers to their higher ups. And so it went, all the way to the



A Chinese propaganda poster from 1958, the year of the Great Leap Forward.

very top, to the Central Party who received hugely inflated numbers about the amount of grain available. It was a twist that the old playwrights never dreamed of: when the state came to take their grossly estimated “fair share” of the harvest, they wound up taking all the reserves—and in many cases, most of the grain the peasants needed merely to survive. It was a man-made, policy-driven famine of terrible, shocking scale.

Over the course of the Leap, upwards of thirty million people died, many due to starvation. Farmers lay down in the fields of their collectives to die, too hungry and exhausted to continue living. Even those who were safely shielded from the brunt of the famine remember the taste of “bread” that was not made of grains, but of ground-up bits of leaves, sticks, or whatever could be found. A cabinet member was dismissed and humiliated for suggesting that the peasants were suffering and the policies needed revision.

In the fall of 1959, as the true horror of the Leap was unfolding, Meng Chao was ill and confined to bed. From his privileged position in Beijing, he took in the cool night air, listened to the mournful cries of insects, and cast his mind into the past. He found himself thinking of a ghost play he had seen as a child, with a beautiful character named Li Huiniang. That character had suffered at the hands of Jia Sidao, and had met an unjust end, returning as a ghost to protect a handsome young scholar. This story wasn’t unexplored in modern China; four years before, a fellow playwright attempted to update the story of Li Huiniang, to make her hew to socialist literary theories by removing its “backward” peasant superstitions: to the horror of his fellow playwrights, he had removed the ghost from the ghost story.*

But Meng Chao envisioned something different: a twist on a classic, not a simple socialist revision. She would have more of a purpose than a mere love affair. If ever there was a time for cosmic justice, for vengeance from beyond the grave—for succor from beyond for the living—surely it was a year when millions of people became hungry ghosts?

* Ma Jianling was a luminary in the theatre world, known not for exquisite poetry and deft deployment of classical allusions, but for sticking close to Mao’s stated ideals for socialist art and literature. He and Meng Chao were both true believers in both traditional opera and its potential for socialist adaptation, but his Li Huiniang, of *Wandering West Lake*, could not have been more different from the Li Huiniang that sprung from Meng Chao. His ghost play was ghostless.

On the surface, it was an eminently logical approach to a dramatic element that had become undesirable. From the late nineteenth century on, Chinese intellectuals had been overwhelmingly concerned with the “backward” nature of Chinese culture and people, represented by fortune telling, belief in fate, and all other *unmodern, unscientific*, superstitious thinking. And what could be more superstitious than belief in ghosts and gods—the idea that after death, people could return in ghostly form to right wrongs or instruct the living?

In Ma’s version, there is a complicated twist of mistaken identity, a doppelgänger of Li Huiniang named Li Ruiniang, and an ending that required no one to die (or more importantly, return from the dead as a ghost). Many artists and intellectuals were—unsurprisingly—horrified. Here was the end result of all those things that sounded so wonderful in the abstract, the calls for purely socialist literature aimed at the proletariat: a ghost play without a ghost! In making it suitable for the superstitious masses, Ma had ruined the play for *the intellectuals*, those with the education to appreciate the immense weight of a glorious literary past. It was probably the first time many of them had really seen the full implications of revising, adapting, and creating art that measured up to their pre-1949 calls. They realized that creating socialist art, in its most extreme form, would mean jettisoning the great achievements that they could call their own. What would then be left?

The fury of intellectual circles must have shocked Ma, and he soon revised his revision. He made Li Huiniang a ghost once more, and it is this version of Ma’s play that remained on the books. Recent reprinting of his *Wandering West Lake* show no trace of his ghostless ghost play.

See Liu Naichong, “Duzhe dui Ma Jianling gaibian ‘You xihu’ juben yijian” [Readers’ opinions on Ma Jianling’s revised script ‘Wandering West Lake’] *Juben* (June 1955): 162-166.

In the waning years of the Qing dynasty—or perhaps the first few years after the declaration of the Republic—a boy from a prominent family watched plays when theatre troupes passed through his hometown of Zhucheng in Shandong province. Young Xianqi likely had no inkling of the momentous changes that had swept away the natural path his life was supposed to take, that of the scholar-official. It would have been a life of studying, exams, and civil service. It was a path his father had followed, and his father before him, and his father before him. But even in a period where the future was ever uncertain, coming from a relatively wealthy, intellectual family still had its advantages. No matter what the future held, he would have a foundation in the classics, a good education, and an appreciation for China's literary past that would grow with time into mastery.

But for now, he crowded close to the front of temporary stages, enthralled by the sight of his favorite literary heroes and villains standing before him in flesh, blood, and bright silks. He had one in particular he loved, a ghost clad in white robes with a silver fringe. They swirled and fluttered around her feet as she seemed to float on the stage, and a red ribbon attached to her glittering headdress represented her violent death. She sang of an unjust life and her love for a living scholar. She was beautiful beyond belief.

Long after he took a pen name—like so many Chinese intellectuals before him—and threw himself into working for a socialist future, he would remember that ghost from his childhood. It was so dazzling a memory that she reappeared to him in the cool autumn of 1959; but also so fleeting that it might as well have been centuries ago.

1600

The reign of the Wanli emperor (1572-1620) was not exactly a bright spot in the history of the Ming dynasty. There were wars and rebellions, increasingly powerful eunuchs, warring factions of Confucian officials, and a growing threat from the Jurchens of Manchuria. It was hardly a situation that a largely unmotivated emperor—possibly a heavy user of opium—was capable of handling.

The shadow of this crumbling dynasty was particularly productive for drama, however. It was a heyday of *chuanqi*, “marvelous tales,” stories of ghosts and dreams and gods and all manner of spectacular subjects, lifeblood of one of the most celebrated works of Chinese literature, Tang Xianzu's *The Peony Pavilion*.

The writer Zhou Chaojun never reached the level of Tang, a true master, but he put to paper his own ghostly tale, called *The Story of Red Plums*. Like many Ming dramas, it was highly self-indulgent—lengthy, confusing, with plot upon plot upon subplot—but its core was a compelling tale of a corrupt ruler, a great crisis, and a love story or two. A young scholar named Pei Yu criticizes the prime minister, Jia Sidao. A concubine named Li Huiniang murmurs a word of appreciation for the young scholar's good looks, and for this she is killed. Pei Yu faces the full wrath of Jia Sidao, but Li Huiniang—tied to the mortal world by her love for Pei, as well as her unjust death—defends him.

For an author like Zhou Chaojun, this was sixteenth-century wish fulfillment, perhaps, a re-imagining of a world where a ruler could be laid low by a ghost who had possessed no power in life, where righteous scholars could effect change, and where beautiful women came back from the dead for the love of the clever.

But who could blame him? To watch society crumble, year-by-year, is a hard fact to face head on. Easier to do what Tang Xianzu, Zhou Chaojun, and many others did: weave historical reality into their own fantasy worlds, where the usual rules did not quite apply. Love could overcome death, the dead could be returned to the world of the living. Ghosts offered the possibility of retribution, and ineffective leaders received their divine comeuppance.

Zhou's convoluted, poorly organized, and fantastical script would grow dusty, but his basic plot and characters would return to life, again and again, over Chinese history. Unlike Tang Xianzu, whose scripts are some of the few sacred cows in Chinese dramatic tradition, generations of writers would tinker with Zhou's story, changing the particulars, trimming plots, changing the dialect. There is something powerful about a righteous

phantasm. And so *Red Plum* took hold in the Chinese dramatic tradition, where ghosts can launch revolutions, and haunt the powerful.

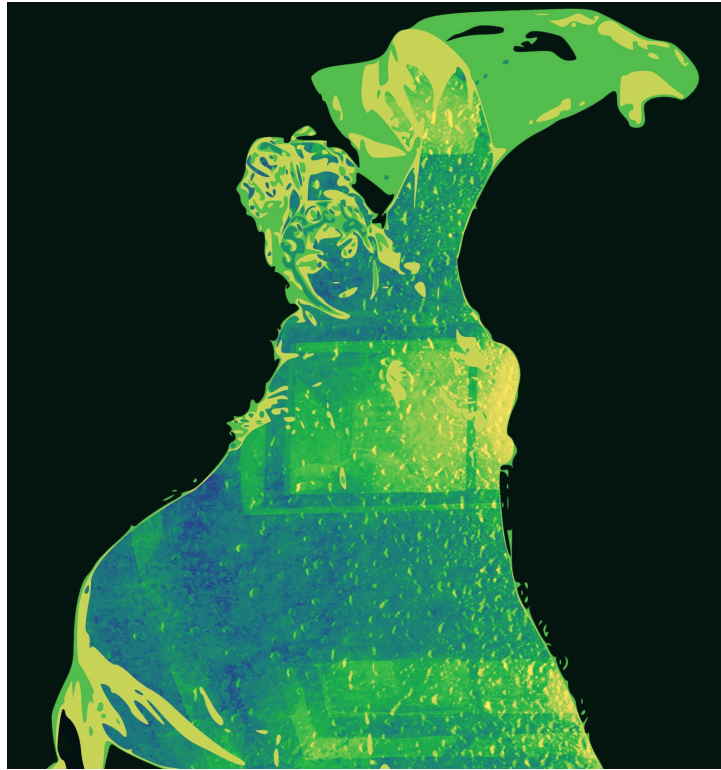
1381

During the early decades of the Ming dynasty, which were just as chaotic as its final decades, a man named Qu You, his dreams of a brilliant official career in ruins, published his *New Tales Told by Lamplight*, a collection of stories that reinvigorated the old “tales of the strange,” and provided source material for generations of writers, in and out of China.

“The Woman in Green” was just one tale of many. A man named Zhao Yuan one day meets a beautiful girl of fifteen or sixteen, an uncommon beauty unadorned by makeup or jewelry. Working up his courage, he asks where she lives, and she laughingly replies that they are in fact neighbors—he simply hasn’t noticed. A flirtation develops into a full-fledged romance, and after a month he asks for her name. Was it really necessary, she asks, to know her name or learn about her family origins—wasn’t having a beautiful woman enough? After Zhao presses her further, she says only “I often wear green, so you may call me ‘the woman in green.’” Zhao, not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth, decides not to inquire further, but thinks she must be a servant girl escaped from a noble household.

Another night, Zhao, a bit drunk, teases her with lines from *The Book of Songs* about a melancholy woman pining for her husband—a man who wears green—who has abandoned her for a concubine. The woman in green takes offense, and disappears for a few days. When she returns, she rebukes her lover for his unkind words, but agrees to tell her fantastic tale.

She was no ordinary servant girl, she explains, but a long-dead servant of Jia Sidao, the prime minister of the Southern Song; Zhao Yuan is



Benjamin Breen, 2013, adapted from an undated photograph by Hu Zhifeng.

no ordinary man, but the reincarnation of her lover of a lifetime ago. Upon discovering that ancient affair, Jia Sidao had ordered them to commit suicide at West Lake.

Was it not fate to meet again like this?

Qu You’s portrayal of the ruler Jia Sidao is as cruel as any that follow. He is abusive to retainers, servants, and concubines, and ignores the suffering of the people. Angry students besiege him with satirical poetry, which enrages him, and he banishes those who challenge his authority.*

The callous prime minister is not the star of the story, however. He matters less than the woman in green, who now, having told her story and lived in marital bliss for several years, dies a *second* death. She shuts her eyes,

* Here we see the miraculous corporality of Chinese ghosts. Imagine needing to be told your lover is, in fact, dead! The wondrous feats they manage seem less surprising, given that they are hardly misty specters.

declaring that the three years she spent with her soul mate's reincarnation satisfied her mortal desires. After bearing her coffin to its final resting place, Zhao finds it curiously light. Opening it up, he discovers only clothing, a hairpin, and other jewelry inside.

Clothing, a hairpin, and other jewelry. An appropriate end, or beginning, for a ghost that will live many, many more lives. To put on the same clothes again and again, always the same and yet different. Qu You provided an empty vessel, to pour from, or to, the fantasies and fears of generation after generation of writers. More powerful in death than in life, she is malleable and ever changing—but she began simply, nameless, the woman in green. Defying death and tyranny for the man she loved.

Is it not fate to meet again like this?



Notes

1. The movie version, which was released in 1981, was based on a production first staged by and starring Hu Zhifeng (who also starred in the film version) in 1979. Hu Zhifeng's version, which she performed with the Suzhou Beijing Opera Troupe, created a sensation when it was first performed, and its popularity translated to the film version, as well. See Gong Yijiang, "Hu Zhifeng he ta de Li Huiniang" [Hu Zhifeng and her Li Huiniang], *Renmin xiju* (June 1980): 33-34; Shi Xin, "Ruiyi chuanguangxin, hongmei canran - cong Hu Zhifeng biaoyan de Li Huiniang tan tuichen chuxin" [Brilliantly blazing new trails, a dazzling red plum - observing Hu Zhifeng's production of Li Huiniang to discuss pushing out the old to uncover the new], *Xiqu yishu* no. 4 (1980): 54-55; Zhou Heping and Xu Ming, "Hu Zhifeng tan Li Huiniang" [Hu Zhifeng talks about Li Huiniang], *Dianying pingjie* (November 1981): 36-37.

2. *Niugui-sheshen* (ox ghost-snake spirit) was originally a Buddhist term, referring to fantastical celestial creatures. Over time, the term came to denote something especially loathsome or horrible. It was frequently deployed in the 1960s and 1970s against people seen as enemies of Mao and the party.

3. The two other men who were the early targets of the Cultural Revolution died long before Meng Chao, and in less pleasant circumstances. Wu Han, having been paraded publicly, beaten and mistreated, would by some reports commit suicide in 1969, having been imprisoned since 1966. Tian Han, the man who wrote the lyrics for China's national anthem and another historically themed play published in 1961, died a year earlier, also in prison.

4. The play was the subject of much positive discussion and admiration in the press. See Tao Junqi and Li Dake, "Yi duo xianyan de 'hongmei' - cong Hongmei ji de gaibaina, tandao kunqu Li Huiniang" [A brightly colored 'red plum' - considering the adaptations of *Story of Red Plums* to discuss the Kun opera *Li Huiniang*], *People's Daily* (28 December 1961); Zhang Zhen, "Kan kunqu xinfan Li Huiniang" (Watching the new Kun opera translation of *Li Huiniang*), *Xiju bao* (August 1961): 47-49.

Fiction: Jepp, Who Defied the Stars

Katherine Marsh

When author and journalist Katherine Marsh set out to write her latest young adult novel, *Jepp, Who Defied the Stars*, she decided to go back in time: to her youth, as a teenager, when she accepted her mother's passion for astrology while struggling to believe in free will; and to late sixteenth-century Europe, when astrology was astronomy's sister, but the divide between fate and self-determination was widening between society's feet.

Marsh's fascinating work of historical fiction centers on Jepp, the teenage dwarf jester of the sixteenth-century Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe at Uraniborg, the Castle of the Heavens, on the island of Hven. Brahe's quest to map the heavens without the use of a telescope was a major moment in the history of science. It created one of Europe's earliest international and meritocratic research communities, explains Marsh, drawing from John Robert Christianson's *On Tycho's Island: Tycho Brahe, Science, and Culture in the Sixteenth Century*.

Jepp also existed, but while we know much about Brahe—and the famed metal prosthetic nose that replaced the original he lost in a duel—we know little about the dwarf he employed. As Marsh puts it in the author's note for *Jepp, Who Defied the Stars*, Jepp “is no more than a footnote of history and, beyond a few biographical details, little is known about him—including who he was or how he ended up at Uraniborg.” Marsh was captivated by the mystery of such a character and set out to tell his story.

She began his journey in a hierarchical and deeply religious world. At the turn of the seventeenth century, Marsh's Jepp, fifteen years old and as tall as he will ever be, leaves his small village to become a dwarf jester at Coudenberg, the majestic palace of the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, ruler of the Spanish Netherlands. “When I was growing up,” Marsh explains, “my parents had a wonderful book of European art, and I remember being deeply drawn to several portraits of court

dwarfs by Diego Velazquez. This seventeenth-century painter, who depicted the court of Philip IV of Spain, captured a dignity and directness of gaze in his dwarf subjects that made them seem more alive than almost anyone else around them.” There was a long history of dwarfs serving royal courts, Marsh learned from Betty M. Adelson's *The Lives of Dwarfs: Their Journey from Public Curiosity toward Social Liberation*. Some had power, but most were cruelly-treated status symbols. Jepp experiences a number of those real-life indignities until he decides to help Lia, another dwarf trapped in the gilded birdcage of the Infanta's retinue.

Lia's story ends in tragedy, however, and when the following excerpt begins, Jepp is locked in his own cage and is traveling across Europe to a destination that his driver, Matheus, refuses to reveal. It is only there that Jepp, in Marsh's wonderful and humane re-imagining of a historical “footnote,” will escape the control of the stars, and exercise his free will. Marsh took some historical liberties to set Jepp on his path, such as extending Tycho Brahe's time at Uraniborg past 1597, and putting the Infanta on the throne before 1599, so that Jepp's time with each might connect. But neither choice detracts from a story that feels historically right and personally meaningful in the ways that matter. It's a story that appeals to adults young and old, struggling at all ages with fate and free will, the wonder of the universe, awkward bodies—physical and celestial—and those all-encompassing questions, ‘Who am I? How can I live with uncertainty? And what can I do?’

We are honored to excerpt it in this issue of *The Appendix*.





Benjamin Breen, after Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, c. 1656

“Uraniborg.”

This is the name the old peasant utters as he takes a hand off the horse’s rein and jabs his finger toward the gatehouse to Tycho’s castle.

As I recall Master Kees’s lessons, I realize a cruel irony of my fate: Lia is dead, my home and mother lost, my father still unknown to me. The heavens have deceived me. But it seems I cannot escape the stars, for I have been sentenced to the castle of Urania, the Greek muse of astronomy.

In the deepening shadows, I hear a chorus of frantic barking and follow the sound to the flat-roofed top of the gatehouse where a half dozen kenneled mastiffs hurl themselves against metal bars. This Hadean welcome is cut short, however, when a scrawny servant boy appears and, with a shout to the dogs, unlocks the gate. Matheus explains that he is here to deliver me to Tycho but it is only the mention of his master’s name that seems to animate the boy, who must not speak Dutch.

As he leads us onto the grounds, I can see that the castle’s name was not bestowed lightly. Uraniborg has been laid out so meticulously that it looks as if it were designed using its patron muse’s signature compass. The gatehouse sits at the vertex of two enormous ramparts, which appear to form a ninety-degree angle. A pin-straight path bisects this angle, leading from the gatehouse to the front entrance of the castle.

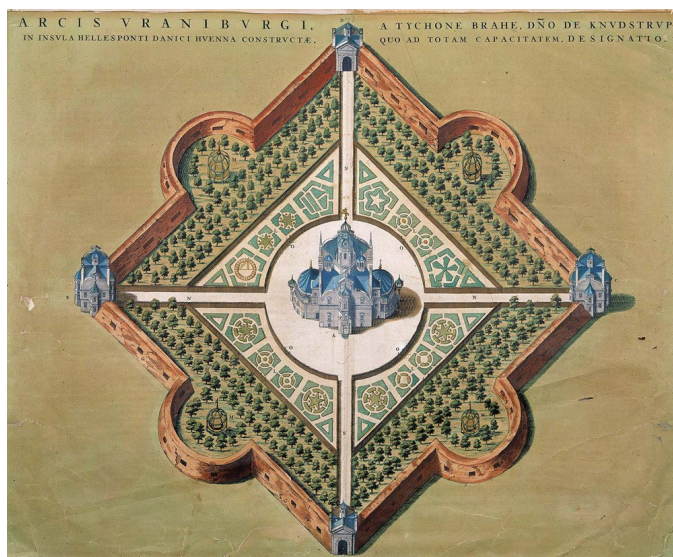
As we follow the servant toward it, we pass an orchard, the spindly fruit trees arranged in as orderly a formation as the Infanta’s, though there seem to be even a greater variety of shapes and sizes. Past the orchard, is a plot of even more elaborate design—a series of snow-encrusted shrubs cut into the forms of stars, circles, and squares. Since I know this Tycho is no king, I wonder again whether he is a sorcerer to have conjured such an intricate universe.

This impression is only heightened when we pass a circular formation of wooden palings and enter a round clearing, in the center of which lies Uraniborg castle. Atop the highest spire, seeming to fly up into the darkening sky, is a rotating statue of Pegasus, the horse’s wings spread as it spins in the

cold breeze. Beneath this lies a limestone crown of domes and cupolas. The turrets that reminded me of ladies’ skirts now seem even more fantastical as they appear to be attached to the sides of the castle’s red brick hull by little more than slender poles. Reclining above the door is a statue of a half-naked Titan resting his hand on a globe of the earth and looking to the heavens.

Even Matheus stops to gaze upon the palace in wonderment. I forget my fears and join him until, from the side of the castle, I hear a cacophony of birdsong, a tangle of chirps and whistles and caws. It seems that my new master keeps an aviary, and the birds’ wild tune returns me to my sorrows. For the singing of the trapped creatures reminds me of Lia and how, because of my actions, her voice is absent from the world’s song.

It is with heavy heart that I follow the servant boy under the statue of the Titan and into a long hall illuminated by torches. I expect it to lead to the sorcerer’s room, a study exhibiting the same misplaced faith in order as the rest of Urania’s kingdom. But what I see instead is so miraculous that I blink several times to be certain I am not dreaming. In the center of a rotunda at the end of the hall is a large bronze fountain with the heads of the four winds arranged at equidistant points around the basin. But more extraordinary than the fountain itself is the water spraying out of the winds’ howling mouths.



Uraniborg, colored woodcut from Tycho Brahe’s *Astronomiae instauratae mechanica* (1598).

[Wikimedia Commons](#)

“How the devil ...?” Matheus says before he catches himself.

I am just as perplexed. Even at Coudenberg there was no such thing as water that ran indoors, never mind a fountain that sprayed water inside in the dead of winter. I stare at the winds, trying to figure out where the water is coming from.

The servant boy watches us, all but ignoring the magic fountain.

Matheus looks uneasily around the rotunda, fingering his lucky copper. Judging from the identical halls that depart around us on all sides, we stand at the very heart of the castle. Adding to the eeriness, there is not a single soul in sight.

“I have business with Lord Tycho,” he says to the boy, his voice commanding but his eyes darting from side to side. “I demand to see him.”

The boy points to the fountain and holds up his hands—gesturing for us to stay where we are, then disappears down one of the corridors and through a door. Matheus paces, staring at the fountain, then turns on his heels and walks nearly the length of the hall we first entered, as if contemplating his own escape. While he does this, I walk up to the magic fountain and hoist myself over the basin. I dip a finger in the burbling water and feel a stab of longing for Lia. She would have loved this fountain, this tiny sea, its mist of spray.

Footsteps sound behind me and I hastily lower myself back to the ground. The servant boy gestures for us to follow him down a hallway that lies perpendicular to the one we first came through. When he comes to the end, he opens a massive wooden door.

The scene that I behold is even more wondrous to me than the fountain we have just left. Inside this circular room, a dozen men labor by the blazing light of candelabras, oblivious to our entrance. Some study a brass globe as large as a bale of hay that rests on a base by the far window; others hunch over wooden desks, their quills dancing; still others search a vast library. For the first time since Lia’s death, I feel my spirits rise. The shelves are lined with hundreds of volumes of every size

and variety. Even the Infanta did not possess so extensive a collection.

I gradually become aware of other curiosities as well—a life-sized metal man and lion stand at attention to the side of the door. Music plays, though I see no musicians. But it is the books to which my gaze returns. I wonder if some of these volumes are devoted to whatever dark arts allows water and music to appear out of thin air. Most of all, I hope that I, too, will be permitted to study them.

A barrel-chested man with a white ruff about his neck breaks away from the group gathered around the globe and marches toward us. His reddish blond hair and beard are mixed with gray, a scar bisects his forehead, and a more frightful detail—part of his nose seems not to be pink, like the rest of his round face, but reddish brown.

“Lord Tycho Brahe?” asks Matheus tentatively.

I have no doubt that, although he does not acknowledge his name, the man who glares at us is Tycho. “No one is supposed to interrupt us until supper,” he grumbles in Dutch. “We are working.”

“We have come all the way from Coudenberg,” says Matheus.

Tycho barely seems to register this defense. Instead he peers down at me. As he does, I get a closer look at his nose and realize that the reddish brown part—the entire upper half—is actually made of copper.

“Another dwarf?” he says wearily as I try not to stare back in horror.

“I have a letter,” says Matheus, as if this explains all.

Tycho impatiently reaches out a hand as Matheus fumbles for the letter. Upon finally securing it, Tycho tears open the seal and glances at it hastily. “Fine. Fine. Let’s proceed.” Switching to a tongue I recognize as Latin, he shouts, “Longomontanus, Severinus, come here!”

Two young men obediently rise from the tables. The first to reach us is a tall youth with a head of golden curls and long limbs that seem to amplify the brevity of my own. From the confidence of his step and the easy smile upon his face, I wonder if he is Tycho's son. Following in his wake is a smaller fellow with a servant's watchful eyes and a scraggly beard.

"Severinus, paper," Tycho says.

To my surprise, it is the tall youth who plays the servant, loping off to fetch paper and quills and sharing them with the smaller man.

"Dwarf jester," Tycho dictates to them. "Six-year minimum. No library access or scholarship privileges. No notes or letters to the outside. No revealing any aspect of our pursuits at Uraniborg."

I am certain my new master assumes that I am unable to follow this ancient tongue. But I do, and the portrait of indenture he paints fills me with despair. My position upon this sorcerer's rock is no different than at Coudenberg. I am once again a "dwarf jester," a plaything of the powerful, a fool whose task is not to study or learn but to amuse those around me. I am barred from this magnificent library, and the books and learning that could have sped the progression of six slow years. To make matters worse, I am not even permitted to correspond with my mother and Willem, who must be wracked with worry over my long silence. I cannot live such a life. I resolve to find a way to escape and return home to Astraveld.

The scribe with the scraggly beard, Longomontanus, crouches down before me and holds out the paper upon which the terms of my service are written and a quill. Blemishes dot his pallid forehead, and his teeth are yellow.

"What is your name?" he asks in Dutch.

"Jepp," I say.

"Can you write, Jepp?"

"Just have him mark the contract with a line," Tycho says impatiently in Latin.

I am tempted to answer my new master in Latin, to tell him that not only can I write, but that I understand his every word and care not for the servitude and hard conditions of my employment. But I have little faith that such a revelation would alter my fate. I am certain that these men, like the courtiers at Coudenberg, are capable of seeing me as little more than an amusement. Better that I play the fool so that they do not suspect I have the cunning and intelligence to escape. Still, I hesitate, for I do not wish to legitimate this devilish contract.

"Time is wasting," Tycho says in Dutch.

"Perhaps he can read Latin?" the handsome youth, Severinus, says in Latin then grins.

I hastily mark the contract in a rude hand, not wishing the others to guess how Severinus's jest approaches the truth. Longomontanus takes back the quill and folds up the contract.

Tycho hands Severinus the letter that heralded my arrival. "Put that with my correspondence," he says in Latin.

Then he swings around and points to Matheus who is staring at the enormous globe. "And get this man out of my house!"

Just as he says this, something shiny flies past me and lands with a clatter on the floor. Matheus begins to back out of the room and when I look up, I can see why. My new master has lost part of his nose. The top, from the middle to the bridge betwixt his eyes, is a gaping hole. However, no one but Matheus seems aggrieved by this, including Tycho himself. He merely sighs as if a crumbling nose is his lot in life.

"Jepp, your labors start now," he says to me in Dutch. "Pick up my nose."

I never thought I would look back fondly to the days of donning the costume of a beast or being baked into a pie. But retrieving a man's nose is a far less savory business. As I squat down to scoop up the copper proboscis, Matheus says, "Goodbye, Jepp. Good luck to you."

I can tell from the pitying look in his eyes that he means it. Unexpectedly, tears well up in my own. Matheus has been my jailor but, faced with the uncertain cruelties of my new home, the memories of his small acts of kindness loom large. I wish not for him to go.

“Goodbye, Matheus,” I say.

He reaches out his rough hand and gently pats my shoulder. Then he turns and follows the servant boy to freedom.

As the door closes behind him, I pass the copper nose up to Tycho. He procures a small box from his vest pocket, dabs some ointment from it onto the back of his nose and affixes it to his face. When he seems satisfied that it will hold, he releases his grip on it.

“You are not to come in here again,” he says. “Jonas will help you prepare for supper, where you will entertain us.”

A few minutes later, a burly valet with a curly thatch of yellow hair opens the door. Tycho issues him instructions in Danish, then peers down his copper nose at me and adds in Dutch, “There is a particular task, Jepp, I believe you well suited for.”

With this my master smiles, and I am left to wonder what new misery awaits me and how quickly I can devise my escape.



Jonas silently leads me back into the hall. Near the base of the fountain, I spot a bent copper and hastily snatch it up. In his fear and confusion, Matheus must have dropped it. But it is too late to return it to him now, besides which I need its auspicious tidings even more than he. Although the water continues to flow from its magical source, there is still not a single soul in sight. But, just as we pass the fountain, I hear hoof-like clops on the marble floor. I tell myself that someone must have ridden a horse into the castle although why Tycho would allow a beast inside to soil his floors and guzzle from his bronze fountain is a mystery. When I listen more closely, however, the clops sound more delicate than that of a horse as if its

hoof is cloven and I wonder if what I am hearing could be human or even, in this mad castle, a mix between beast and man.

This mystery, like the invisible music and flowing water, is left unsolved as Jonas ushers me down the hall and through a door at the end of it. To my relief, this room is nothing stranger than a kitchen. Flavorful clouds of steam hover in the air and fish and game of numerous sizes and shapes lie on a large wooden table, waiting for the cook's alchemy of fire and spice. The cook, a large man with cheeks so round they look as if they have been stuffed with apples, shouts orders at a bevy of women. He greets me with but a brief look as if, not being hare or goose or boar, I am of little interest to him. But several of the women allow their eyes to linger, their red faces giving them the appearance of being stewed along with their dishes.

Jonas says something in Danish but all I can make out is my name, Jepp, which the women repeat softly over their pots and dough like an incantation. I notice their straw-filled pallets stacked in one corner of the kitchen and I hope that I will be stowed along with them in this warm and savory realm. I imagine growing plump in my melancholy, a creature of appetite whose loneliness and grief is dulled by his gut.

But, to my regret, Jonas leads me into a chamber dim and chilly by comparison. Although pallets cover nearly the entire floor, proof of an invisible army of servants, not a single soul inhabits the shadows. As Jonas searches through a sack left atop one of the pallets, I cannot help but think of Lia's song—of love left on a distant shore, of silent seas, and being held captive—and how it has become my own. I run my fingers along the spiny seashell in my pocket.

A short while later, Jonas finds what he is searching for—a many-pointed cap that jingles with bells. At the sight of it, my despair deepens, for it confirms that I am yet again expected to humiliate myself for the pleasure of the rich and powerful. But I fear what will happen to me if I openly resist and, as he gestures for me to do, I put it on.

We sit silently side by side in the darkening gloom until a knock sounds. At this signal, Jonas leads

me back into the blazing hall where we stop before a door next to the forbidden library. A great din of voices and tongues issues from inside as if Tycho has transformed the birds in his aviary to human form. Jonas opens the door wide and pushes me through.

The room before me is generous in its proportions and richly appointed—in one corner is a towering tile stove, in another a curtained four-post bed where Tycho and his wife must sleep. In the center of the room, is a sideboard laden with silver vessels for drink, all of them engraved with the same coat of arms. But it is a long oaken table against the far wall that commands my attention. Sitting on benches on the far side of it are at least forty souls, chattering with vigor as the cook's labors lie steaming before them—a slab of what looks to be venison drenched in sauce, a whole fish, a tureen of stew, a side of rare beef, a platter of tongue, chicken, eggs and eel, and heaps of sugar cakes.

Lording over this feast, on a seat higher than the others, is my new master, his copper nose glinting in the candlelight. A plump, flaxen-haired woman sits on the elevated perch beside him and a gaggle of fair-haired children flank him—ranging in age from shrieking infant with nurse to noisy young woman banging her fist on the table upon some point. I am relieved for their sake to see that all of them have inherited their mother's sturdy, upturned nose.

"Jepp," Tycho says, waving a tankard in the air. Then he says something in Danish and his company bursts into laughter. I steel myself for more insults.

One man pipes up and then another follows but both speak Danish and the only words I catch in common are "per gek." But whatever the men have said, Tycho seems little amused by it. He grimaces and shakes his head. Then he points at me.

"Under the table," he says in Dutch.

I wonder if I have misheard him or whether he has made a slip in a foreign tongue. Surely, he wants me to sit at the table, not under it. I walk hesitantly to the edge of it, the smells of the banquet making my stomach tighten.

"Now under!" says Tycho impatiently.

I stoop beneath the edge, expecting him to stop me. But he does no such thing. A long, straight finger descends under the table and points to his black leather shoes.

"Sit at my feet," he says.

I wonder if this is the task he has envisioned me well suited for. I can hardly stomach the indignity of this arrangement but I cannot betray my strong will, besides which Don's bruises are but newly healed and I fear the price of disobedience. As I crouch at my master's feet, I feel as if he has transformed me into a hound. Above, there are delicacies, laughter, the company of men, while below I quiver, my gut rumbling. This impression is only strengthened when Tycho's ringed hand slides under the table with a morsel of venison. As he waves it before my face, I realize I am meant to take it. I briefly consider refusing but my hunger triumphs over my pride and I snatch it from his hand. My obedience is rewarded with another morsel—a slice of eel.

As I chew it, I hear a tankard pound the table above my head.

"A few words on the great work of Uraniborg!" Tycho says in Latin.

Though I dare not bite my master's hand, I can at least take satisfaction in eavesdropping on his labors, which he seems so eager to keep secret from the world. Perhaps I will even glean some intelligence that will aid in my escape.

"Severinus, please share our most recent progress."

I see a pair of long feet shift as their owner rises. "Thank you, my lord," says Severinus in a voice nearly as bold as his master's. "As of this day, we have collected 793 stars."

The table thunders above me as fists pound it in applause. But I am perplexed. How does one collect a star? I imagine Tycho's army of scholars flying through the sky with nets. I wonder where Tycho stores all these stars, and whether it is they

that power Uraniborg's magical fountain and fill his study with music.

"This is work well done." Tycho says when the applause dies down. "But we must hasten our efforts while maintaining the precise standards that Urania has set for us. To a thousand stars!"

"A thousand stars!" echoes the table. Their cheer is so rousing that if Tycho's nose had not tumbled off and clattered to the floor in front of me, I might have forgotten myself and joined in. I pick it up just as an empty palm impatiently appears before me, and in a strange reverse of our eating ritual, I drop the nose into it. I can see Tycho's other hand dig into his pocket for his box of ointment.

A moment later, when the nose is doubtlessly back in place, Tycho bangs his tankard yet again.

"To celebrate our continued progress, my new dwarf, Jepp, will amuse us," he says in Latin.

I feel the toe of a shoe drive into my back and I crawl out from under the table. Forty pairs of eyes watch me expectantly as I stand beside my new master.

"Well?" thunders Tycho. "What can you do?"

My true talent is books and languages. But this I will never reveal and, thankfully, Lia has given me another.

"I can dance."

"Jacob!" Tycho says.

A dark-haired lutenist appears and strikes up a lively melody. Though I have not danced since Lia's death, I am relieved to discover that my feet remember what my mind cannot. But I take little pleasure in the applause and cheers that follow my performance. For I think only of Lia and how it pains me to perform the French dance without her.

Tycho laughs heartily as I bow. "What a sight!" he says in Latin.

He hands me an oyster and sends me back under the table.

Jacob begins to play a ballad and for a brief moment, I imagine that Lia has been brought back to life by the magic of Tycho's 793 stars. But Jacob's song is long and far less beautiful than Lia's. Tycho continues to proffer me tidbits, which by the lengthy ballad's end leave me feeling as if I have actually consumed a meal. Still, each bite fills me with shame and, as Jacob plucks the final strings of his song and servants appear to take away the dishes, I pray that the banquet is over and Tycho will release me. But as more servants appear and more savory smells fill the room, I realize that the supper is merely beginning. Above I can hear the splash and fizzle of ale and wine being poured, the thunderous laughter of my master, the clatter of silverware. A bite of roast lamb with beets is handed to me under the table, then a few crumbs of almond tart. One of the scholars recites a poem he composed on the glories of the heavens later another man sings.

As the voices above grow louder and merrier with drink, Tycho's children race wildly around the table. A boy of perhaps five, though no taller than I, with a round face and wispy blond hair, dodges under the table and sticks his tongue out at me before he is hauled back out of my realm by an invisible hand. Then a second face appears, that of the young woman whom I had first seen banging her fist on the table. That she is in so indecorous a position, crouched on her knees, seems to cause her no shame though her form is most womanly. Her round face hangs over me like a moon, cratered by a few white smallpox scars. She appraises me with a bold, unapologetic stare then says something in Danish.

"You don't speak our language," she says in Latin when I fail to respond.

I almost shake my head in reply before I stop myself. I have never heard a woman speak this ancient tongue though it surprises me not that a sorcerer's daughter would have this skill. Why she thinks I possess it, however, strikes me as most curious.

“My name is Magdalene,” she continues in Latin. “I am sorry on my brother’s behalf.”

Though I wish to acknowledge her, I instead hold up my hands and smile foolishly as if to indicate I do not understand. Magdalene shrugs as if I no longer warrant her interest and disappears.

Before I can make head or tails of this odd conversation, the door opens and I hear the strange clapping sound of the creature I heard earlier. Merry shouts issue from the table, Tycho’s loudest of all, as I behold four brown legs, moving with the wobbly motion of a man on stilts. As I peer out from beneath the table, I can see Jonas lead in the rest of the creature, a massive mix of horse and cow. Enormous antlers, like the bones of an angel’s wings, rest atop its head and a brown wattle-like beard hangs down from its neck.

Upon reaching the table, it bellows pitifully. Then the bellowing abruptly stops, replaced by wet, slopping sounds and the occasional snort. I crawl out from beneath the table and peek over the edge. To the delight of Tycho and his boisterous company, the beast is muzzle deep in a tankard of ale.

“Jepp!” Tycho says, as if recalling my presence. His nose, I notice, is not properly affixed but tipped to one side. He draws himself up in his chair as if to make some grand declaration and I wonder if he means to reprimand me for abandoning my post.

“This is Ulf,” he says in Dutch. “My moose. He is tame and exceedingly partial to a draught of ale.”

Though I would not have been surprised if the creature had turned to me and issued a proper Latin greeting, Ulf takes no notice of our introduction. He instead clatters the tankard against the table in his efforts to devour its dregs.

Tycho’s nose loosens further as he leans toward me. “The great disadvantage to Ulf’s appetites is that on occasion he has broken free and wandered the halls in an inebriated state. This is quite dangerous for him. But you, Jepp, can prevent that! As his bedmate!”

I smile wanly, certain that my new master is playing some trick upon me for his amusement.

“It is good fortune indeed that you were sent to us,” Tycho concludes. “Now you and Ulf may retire for the night.”

Pulling a rope around Ulf’s neck, Jonas tries to lead him away from the table, but the moose—its muzzle still wedged in the tankard—won’t budge. Clearly this is not the first time Jonas has met with such obstinate behavior for he next takes the tankard with him, using it to entice the beast forward. The moose belches, filling the air with the smell of hops, and stumbles after it.

Tycho gestures for me to follow him, which I do at a safe distance. Even though my master waves as though he does not expect to see me again, I wager that this is but a jest and Jonas will send me back as soon as the moose is secured in its stable.

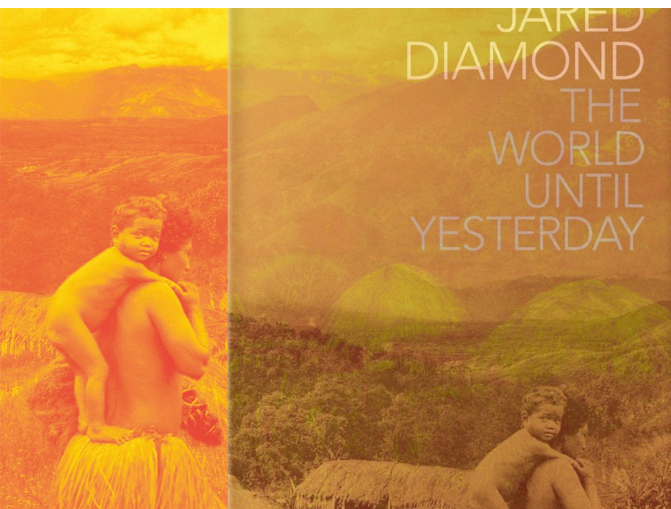
But the room to which he leads Ulf is no stable but a small, door-less chamber off the kitchen covered with straw and reeking of animal fur and dung. Jonas ties the creature to a post on the wall. Ulf guzzles from a small basin into which flows another mysterious stream of water whilst Jonas sets a straw-filled tick on the floor, tossing a coarse blanket atop it. It is only then that I realize that Tycho fully intends for me to sleep with this creature. Jonas points to the pallet and then to me, confirming this impression, as he departs.

After studying it for some time, I conclude that the pallet is just far enough away that so long as Ulf does not break his tether and embark on one of his drunken nocturnal gambols, I should escape being trampled. This gives me little comfort, however, as I lie on the pallet and stare at Ulf’s massive rump. Tycho is most certainly another cruel and capricious master. I take out Matheus’s bent copper and rub it between my fingers as he did. I cannot accept that this—a life of ignominy, loneliness, and loss—is what fate intends for me.

When at last I fall asleep, I dream Lia and I are trying to escape this diabolical island, chased through the night by Tycho’s stars.

Anthropology, Footnoted: Jared Diamond's *The World Until Yesterday*

Alex Golub



If the unloved moments of history live on only in appendices, and forgotten scholars are relegated to footnotes, then one injustice of Jared Diamond's new book is its dearth of end matter.

Jared Diamond is one of the world's greatest public intellectuals, and his two previous books, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and *Collapse* have shaped our awareness of what human history has been and could be. The reason I worry about the footnotes to his most recent book is that I am one of them. *The World Until Yesterday* is powerfully shaped by Diamond's time in the highlands of Papua New Guinea ('PNG', as everyone calls it). I conducted research in these very same highlands and moved in the same small circle that Diamond did: he quotes my colleagues and dedicates his book to a woman I've interviewed. I used his description of birdsong in *Birds of New Guinea* in the course of my fieldwork. Because of this, I saw some of my own experiences echoed in Diamond's book. On the whole, however, I found my own understandings of Papua New

Guinea portrayed in a way that is accurate but also ever-so-subtly distorted—as if my work, and that of my colleagues, had been turned into a footnote, then edited out of the final manuscript to clear the way for conclusions we would never make.

The topic of *The World Until Yesterday* is in its title: in the book, Diamond examines the lifeways of non-Western people, who he claims live the way we used to ten thousand years ago (that's 'yesterday' in geologic time). His goal is to see what their cultures have to offer those of us who are 'developed' and slightly nostalgic for the good old days. This is Diamond's most personal book, as well as his most anthropological one. Anthropologists have long sought to improve American culture by juxtaposing it with the culture of others. Margaret Mead, for instance, argued in 1927 that "it is possible to make a more reasoned judgment of the needs of our own society" by "the study and analysis of the diverse solutions which other members of the human race have applied to the problems which confront us today." So when Diamond writes in 2013 that "traditional societies may not only suggest to us some better living practices, but may also help us appreciate some advantages of our own society that we take for granted," he is pursuing an old anthropological project—albeit with a slightly new, more triumphalist tack.

It would be easy for anthropologists to dismiss Diamond because he didn't write the book we wanted to read. But sadly, *The World Until Yesterday* has a more serious problem: the book fails to complete the project Diamond has set for himself. *The World Until Yesterday* is clearly written, well-conceptualized, and unresponsive to

the human condition. The great tragedy of this book is not that Diamond has become the Margaret Mead of the twenty-first century, or that his work will be widely read, while the work of anthropologists and Papua New Guineans will be relegated to history's appendix. The great tragedy of this book is that the profundity of Diamond's personal entanglement with Papua New Guinea is lost because he can only describe—and imagine—the Papua New Guineans he has encountered in the language he uses to describe birds.



To be fair, *The World Until Yesterday* is not completely bereft of end matter. But the ten pages of 'further reading' (only five of which actually list further reading) cannot possibly bear the weight of Diamond's argument. To contrast the lifeways of 'traditional societies' with our own, modern society, and to see what we can learn from them, Diamond must first reconstruct all aspects of those traditional societies, noting their similarities and differences. It's a recklessly ambitious task, the sort carried out by Victorian gentlemen who produced well-known tomes like *The Golden Bough* and *Scatalogic Rites of All Nations*. Diamond is aware that the enormity of reconstructing 'traditional society' could detract from actually learning from it. In practice, he tends to concentrate his attention on peoples of the Amazon, South Africa (think: 'bushmen'), and the island of New Guinea, which is home to the independent state of Papua New Guinea in the east (where I once lived), and the Indonesian province of Papua in the west. To a certain extent, I can buy Diamond's claims that he skipped a massive apparatus of footnotes and bibliographies in order to save the casual reader both time and money—proving most of his claims would be the work of a lifetime. Still, it is telling that we live in an age when a member of America's National Academy of Sciences and one of the world's foremost public intellectuals has less concern for citations and footnotes than do the contributors to Wikipedia.

In Diamond's analysis of the West and Traditional Societies, the West wins by technical knockout. Traditional Societies eat healthier diets, but fear starvation. They treat their children more humanely than we do, but their societies are locked

in cycles of warfare triggered by grief and revenge. We treat our elders poorly, but their lifespans stretch decades longer than those of people in Traditional Societies. Diamond clearly wants to show the world the complex reality of 'traditional societies' and he is careful to point out the variety within them, and the ugly behavior that occurs in some, but not all, of them.

In the end, however, Diamond believes that the advantages of living in an industrial, modern nation far out-weigh the costs. He suffers from what Marshall Sahlins calls "sentimental pessimism," the nostalgic longing for a world that you are sure is destined to pass away. Civilization, in so many words, is simply better than the life lived by traditional societies. "Traditional people ... willingly abandon their jungle lifestyle," Diamond writes. In the words of one New Guinean he quotes, settled life means "rice to eat, and no more mosquitoes."



Arguments like this have attracted a legion of haters to Diamond's work, ranging from unhinged trolls to staid professors (*Collapse* actually has an entire book dedicated to dismantling it entitled *Questioning Collapse*). In the brief time it has been in press *The World Until Yesterday* has attracted its own criticisms as well, but few of them seem to stick. Why?

Some commentators argue that Diamond contributes to an intangible but potent discourse that harms indigenous people—a claim which is true, but will only convince those who have already bought in to the idea of potent discourses, and is unlikely to convince anyone else. Others criticize Diamond for how the press and public interpret his work, rather than for what he actually said, which is not fair. Like Mead, Diamond sometimes draws flack from those who disagree in principle with the compromises that are part of any broad, popular work. But this is an argument against accessibility itself, not Diamond the man.

More thoughtful critiques of Diamond have been made, and yet even they slide off him. Some critics claim that Diamond believes that culture is merely an adaptation to the environment, and not a force

in and of itself that shapes human life. And yet it is clear that Diamond recognizes this fact—indeed, it's telling that Diamond is uneasy with just how little of the details of human culture he can explain (a weakness I will discuss below). They claim that he doesn't appreciate the role of individual agency in history, but Diamond has written of the way leaders make decisions that shape nations, and nations make decisions that shape history. This was, after all, his argument in *Collapse*. They claim that he 'decontextualizes' (a very bad thing to do according to anthropologists), ignoring colonialism and other ways that human communities are affected by each other. But this was precisely his topic in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.

Those of us who have not drunk the haterade face an interesting question: why does Diamond rub us the wrong way? Why do we find his work so troubling? Why, despite his careful hedging, do anthropologists like me find it so misguided?

A Bird's Eye View of Humanity

To understand Diamond's broader worldview, it's worth moving past his popular writings to consider his career as a whole. Many critics have misread *The World Until Yesterday* because they assume that Diamond's overall thought is no more complex than what is conveyed in his popular books. In order to understand this newest book, however, we must go deeper. In fact, Diamond has thought long and hard about what it means to offer a historical explanation, how different groups interact with each other, and what it means to study change and transformation over time. But while anthropologists have asked these questions while studying people, Diamond has asked them while studying birds.

Like anthropologists, Diamond has thought deeply about how to defend the legitimacy of his discipline against those who insist that the only sort of knowledge that counts is 'Science.' But while anthropologists have defended themselves from the depredations of biologists like Diamond, Diamond has been looking over his shoulder at the physicists, who have discovered natural laws with no analogue in evolutionary biology. Like anthropologists, he is a fieldworker who gathers data through observation, not experiment, but he

studies avian populations, not human communities. Like anthropologists, Diamond is interested in producing a history of the complex connections between his community, other species, and the environment. But while Diamond does this work in the name of natural history and evolutionary biology, anthropologists do it in the name of cultural history and political economy. Whereas anthropologists of Papua New Guinea have studied the relationship between residence and descent in cognatic societies, Diamond has examined the biogeography of montane avifauna.

Here, then, is the reason why Diamond's work looks like our own, reflected back to us in distorted form, as if from a funhouse mirror: for decades Diamond has followed a parallel track to anthropologists, working in the same country and asking the same questions. But his topic and methods are unmistakably different. The result is an author who looks and talks like us, and who inhabits an alternate universe almost exactly like our own, except for one key difference whose consequences ramify out, altering the entire universe in small but important ways.

In his previous books, we could not see Diamond's changeling nature because of the topics he chose: when you're doing ten thousand years of history in four hundred pages, people *do* look a lot like other animals. But in the more intimate setting of *World*, Diamond's natural-historical mind-set creates problems that sabotage his book in two key areas: the study of power relations, and his ability to understand the details of human culture.



At the most basic level, the biggest problem with Diamond's work is that he didn't get the memo on colonialism, despite the fact that he himself has helped write substantial portions of it. Diamond operates with a Whiggish view of history, seemingly suggesting (but never out-and-out saying) that the modern nation state is naturally the best form of government yet invented. For over five millennia, he writes, people have "more or less willingly (not just under duress)" surrendered their individual freedoms to gain the benefits of government. It is as if the modern nation state is the ideal adaptation for the human species. It's an

argument that radically underplays the downsides of social inequality within states—and when, by the way, do children born in modern states officially decide to willingly live in them?—but, more importantly, it is one that overlooks the historical process by which such states expanded across the globe.

In his own equally sweeping global history *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years*, the anthropologist David Graeber has made the exact opposite point: that highly complex social systems are fundamentally based on violence and subordination, not consent. Graeber gets guff from the right the same way that Diamond gets it on the left, and it's true that world-historical diagnoses rely on philosophical premises that reasonable people can disagree about: What is the good life, that people might accept it in exchange for government? What constitutes consent when people are socialized into a preexisting state? (I'd argue, though, that Graeber has thought much more deeply about these issues than Diamond.)

But the actual historical record is much less malleable, and you don't have to be a bleeding heart liberal or activist to recognize that in the past five centuries the West's expansion across the planet has been grisly and violent. The facts speak for themselves. While many indigenous people actively resisted colonialism (and continue to today) there is no doubt that the spread of the nation has been a brutally successful affair.

No one knows the impact that guns, germs, and steel have had on human history better than Diamond, and yet *The World Until Yesterday* seems strongly to suggest that being taken over by white people is not that bad a fate. He notes, for instance, that inter-group fighting in traditional societies decreases after contact with the West. This is a bit like saying that Han Solo should be grateful to Darth Vader for encasing him in carbonite because it cut down on his consumption of trans fats, or that America's nuclear strike on Hiroshima improved air quality there by decreasing the number of people commuting to work in their cars. Make no bones about it: the reason fighting stops in traditional societies after contact is that, in too many cases, there are no traditional societies left to fight. Life on the rez might not involve

tribal warfare, but that hardly means that the Trail of Tears was a good idea.

There are exceptions to this rule, of course, and one of the biggest exceptions happens to be the one that most shaped Jared Diamond: the highlands of Papua New Guinea. Few have appreciated how much his time there may have affected his outlook on history and colonialism. Papua New Guinea had a relatively benign experience of colonization, partially because of its brevity (1884–1975) and the good intentions of its colonizers, but mostly due to their lack of resources and general incompetence (as the historian John Waiko points out, in early campaigns to pacify the Binandere, it was the Australians who were under the Binandere thumb, not the other way around). This was particularly true of the highlands. In 1884, when European powers first annexed what is today PNG, coastal people felt the impact the most. It was not until the 1930s (or even later in some areas) that Australia took control of the highlands.

Grass Clearing Man, Paul Sillitoe's scrupulously detailed reconstruction of pre-contact life in the highlands, demonstrates that highlanders cared more about obtaining wealth than being great warriors—although to be sure, violence could be a way to earn renown for some. Contrary to Diamond's argument, the moral failing of most highlanders is embezzlement, not violence. Australia's apartheid system in PNG resulted in the wealth highlanders desired, as well as a welfare state paid by Australian citizens (and missionary organizations), and government officers who patiently tolerated highlanders' attempts to shake it apart to pick up the good bits. Although often racist, absent, and inconstant, Australian rule was preferred by many highlanders to rule by educated coastal elites, whom highlanders feared would reduce them to second class citizens.

Diamond has surely visited much more of the country than the highlands, but his intuitions about the country seem fundamentally shaped by the highlands. His immersion in that area, I believe, is the origin of his view that colonialism brings benefits, that people are willing to trade their old ways for new, and that imperial conquest brings few problems—in the long term. Then again, Diamond's tone-deafness regard-

ing these issues might be related to his scientific background. Bird species are morphologically distinct, but human communities in Papua New Guinea lack bright and clear boundaries. Cultures, languages, and subsistence techniques ooze across the landscape, passing through villages and hamlets with a mobility totally different than the learned behavior of birds. The issues at the heart of population ecology are calories, birth-rates, and morbidity while the central topics of legitimate and empowering governance are dignity, freedom, and quality of life—the things we fight for, but not the sort of thing that you learn about studying avifauna. Only people, not birds, would rather die on their feet than live on their knees.



The Hold Life Has

Or perhaps Diamond has it right. It's ironic that Diamond's thinking about people is so shaped by his thinking about birds, because many Papua New Guineans think in the same terms. In his classic ethnography *Sound and Sentiment* Steve Feld writes that "birds are mediators [between death and life] because they are both natural beings and the 'gone reflections' of Kaluli who have left the visible world upon death and reappeared." That's why Kaluli spend so much time thinking about "which birds say their names, which ones only sound, make a lot of noise, whistle, speak the Bosavi language, weep, sing, or dance." Both animals and absent loved ones, for Kaluli birds are the definition of aesthetic beauty. "Song is inspired by thinking about birds; when it is performed, it is sung in a bird voice; men wear bird feathers to make themselves beautiful and evocative." When death and loss move women to weep, onlookers say they sound like an Ornate Fruitdove, "because the weeping has bird sounds as its melodic base and sadness over loss as its social base."

The Kaluli worldview is a melancholy one, deeply aware of the power of human connection, as well as its impermanence. Ipili speakers, who I once lived with, imagine our vital energy as something like water, a fluid energy that drains slowly out of us and into our children. As the anthropologist Jerry Jacka astutely put it, Ipili are fundamentally aware that we are biodegradable. It for this rea-

son that the young are plump and round and the elderly old and shriveled. Ipili call their children their *lawa*, a word that could be translated as 'replacement' but also 'exchange' or even 'trade.' In the West, we are not supposed to admit that we view our children as parasites, but Ipili are willing to face up to that fact. Ipili feel clearly a deep and ambivalent realization about the costs and pleasures of parenthood that I've learned to appreciate all the more now that I am a parent myself. I never cease to be amazed by how distinct and vibrant—how genuinely different—Papua New Guinean cultures are from the America I grew up in. I believe Diamond when he tells us how much he has learned from Papua New Guineans, because I myself have learned so much from them and feel that it is such a privilege to visit the country.

But readers of *The World Until Yesterday* will not find out that adorned dancers are birds, that we pour energy into our children, that a clan becomes reality in the danced unison of its men, or that we grow, like taro, only when others cannot see us. This, for me, is *The World Until Yesterday*'s biggest failing: it desires to understand what Papua New Guineans have to teach us, but ultimately cannot. *The World Until Yesterday* seeks to understand how Papua New Guineans love their children so that we might love our own better, but can only conclude, lamely, that we ought to carry them vertically and not horizontally. In the macro-level history of *Guns, Germs, and Steel* it was forgivable that Diamond treated humans as like other animals in an ecological system. In the extended close-up that is *World*, it is inexcusable.

In this review I've emphasized the similarities between Diamond and Margaret Mead. But there is another anthropological ancestor to whom Diamond is deeply indebted: Bronislaw Malinowski, the great pioneer of the method of participant observation. Malinowski's charter for anthropology is very similar to Diamond's goal in *The World Until Yesterday*:

Perhaps as we read the account of these remote customs there may emerge a feeling of solidarity with the endeavours and ambitions of these natives. Perhaps man's mentality will be revealed to us, and brought near, along some lines which we never have followed before. Perhaps through

realising human nature in a shape very distant and foreign to us, we shall have some light shed on our own. In this, and in this case only, we shall be justified in feeling that it has been worth our while to understand these natives, their institutions and customs.

But in fact, Malinowski's focus on empathy and identification couldn't be more different from Diamond's naturalist gaze. Malinowski argues that "to study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behaviour and mentality *without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realising the substance of their happiness*—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man" [my emphasis]. He argued that we must record the "imponderabilia of actual life" in order to "grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world." "We have to study man," Malinowski writes, "and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is, the hold which life has on him." This is exactly what Diamond has not done, and it is a task that biology has not prepared him for.

Unlike some critics, I take Diamond at his word: I believe that he does want to show traditional lives in their complex reality, to demonstrate what they have to teach us without unduly idealizing them. He wants us to see people who live careful, attentive lives in a world of want and uncertainty, people who know how to love their children without reading books on how to do so. He wants to show us the dangers of war, and the bittersweet comforts of industrialization. Above all, he wants to show us how he has been changed by the life he has led. In the end, however, his scientist's eye plays him foul. Diamond's stories give one a clear understanding of the exact physical locations of the objects he describes, but leave the culture and emotion of Papua New Guineans unexamined. His description of the lives of traditional people accurately describes their digestion and gestation, but not their thoughts and feelings. And in the end, despite his attempts to be nuanced, his portrayal of the life of traditional people is straight out of Hobbes: nasty, brutish, short, and escapable only by submitting to the authority of a sovereign.

But there is nothing in the study of wildlife that prepares you for the work of empathy, interpretation, and observation that anthropology requires and the public wants. It is not just that Diamond did not systematically record the imponderabilia of everyday life because he was too busy watching birds. It is not just that he moved around too frequently to put in the time needed to understand a particular community of Papua New Guineans, or that he glosses over the differences between Papua New Guinean cultures for the sake of a general audience. The problem is that, at a basic level, a naturalist can do a good impersonation of an anthropologist, but it will only ever be that: an impersonation. Diamond's inability to show us the inside of the cultures he studies, despite his professed desire to do so, is proof of that.

Malinowski was convinced that anthropology could be both a natural science of society and the greatest adventure story ever told, and anthropologists have attempted to reconcile that vision ever since. For a hundred years we have been trying to answer the questions that Diamond asks in *The World Until Yesterday*: How can we write compellingly about human life without sliding into subjectivism and anecdote? How can we honor the details of individual lives even as we generalize about the fate of whole cultures? Can objectivity be a goal when our greatest advantage as observers is our empathy and understanding? Anthropologists have discovered that to achieve Diamond's goal we must move beyond recording the behavior of humans in the way a biologist records the behavior of other animals. Instead, we must grasp the significance and meaning of these practices—not just because of a moral imperative to understand others, but out of methodological necessity.

As Ira Bashkow writes in his masterful account of Papua New Guinean attitudes towards Europeans, *The Meaning of Whitemen*, most thinking about others is just a way to reflect on ourselves. Diamond's work is, like Mead's and Malinowski's, one more attempt by anthropologists to undertake this much broader task. I can only hope that in the future it will be our work, not Diamond's, that will help a global readership understand where they have come from, and where they are going.

NOT-SO-FUNNY PAGES

Not-So-Funny Pages: “The Tremendous Man of Color!!”

Andrew Cohen

Andrew Cohen is a comic booker in Washington, DC. In addition to his self-published projects like *Howzit Funnies*, he has contributed stories to the Eisner-nominated anthology *Trickster* and the follow-up anthology *District Comics*. More of his work appears on his website, <http://howzitfunnies.blogspot.com>.

Of his piece in this issue of *The Appendix*, Cohen writes, “Tom Molineaux was a nineteenth-century boxer. To add anything more—to imply that he was a success, or a failure, or a cautionary tale, for instance—would be to assume too much about how we choose to understand his life. His contemporaries tended to see Tom’s life with hindsight, from the vantage point of his death; today, we tend to look forward, from his youth, to the important events of his early life. This comic tries something else, by picking a particular moment and then telling Tom’s life in three directions: backward from that moment, forward from that moment, and finally within that moment itself. Factually, nothing is changed. However, by changing the structure of how Tom’s biography is told, the events of his life are re-juxtaposed and are hopefully illuminated with the light of new contrasts.”



A COMIC BY
ANDREW COHEN

MAY 31, 1814.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THIS IS THE LAST
HIGH POINT OF TOM MOLINEAUX'S LIFE.



HE'S BOXING A MAN NAMED WILLIAM FULLER -
A COMPETENT, IF UNEXCEPTIONAL, FIGHTER, WHO
SEEMS TO BE IN GOOD SPIRITS.



TOM, MEANWHILE, IS "DISSIPATED TO EXCESS, COMPLETELY
GONE OFF IN CONSTITUTION, AND BROKEN WINDED."
MANY OF THE ONLOOKERS BELIEVE THAT HE HAS LONG
SINCE LOST "THE GAME," HAVING HAD IT BEATEN OUT
OF HIM, YEARS AGO, BY THEIR HERO, TOM CRIBB.



STILL, MOLINEAUX IS FLATTERING HIMSELF
THAT FULLER WILL ULTIMATELY LOSE.



AS IT TURNS OUT,
HE'LL BE RIGHT.



IT WILL BE THE LAST
FIGHT HE EVER WINS.

**TOM
MOLINEAUX
IS...**

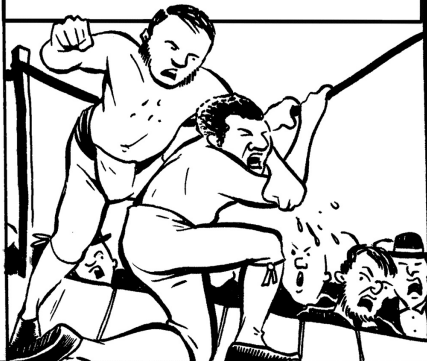
"The TREMENDOUS MAN of COLOR!!"

HIS PAST...

HIS PRESENT...

HIS FUTURE...

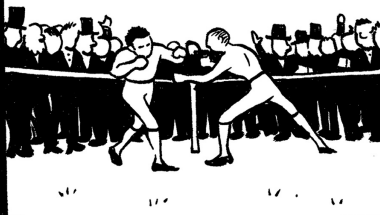
APRIL 2, 1813: TOM IS JEERED AS A "FOP," A "CUR," AND A "SHADOW AND OUTLINE OF A MAN," WINNING A FIGHT ONLY BECAUSE HIS OPPONENT FAINTS ON THE KNEE OF HIS OWN SECOND.



SEPTEMBER 28, 1811: TOM LOSES HIS REMATCH TO TOM CRIBB, IN FRONT OF 20,000 PEOPLE. TOM HAS NO STAMINA AND SUFFERS A BROKEN JAW. THE FIGHT LASTS NINETEEN MINUTES, AND CRIBB INSISTS ON WINNING BY KNOCKOUT.



MAY 31, 1814: THE PRESENT FIGHT IS HELD ON THE DRYMEN ROAD, IN AUCHINEUX, 12 MILES FROM GLASGOW. IT BEGINS WITH EASY SPARRING AND POSITIONING.



FULLER CRACKS TOM'S HEAD FOR "FIRST BLOOD." TOM RESPONDS WITH A FEROCIOUS ATTACK, BUT FULLER FENDS HIM OFF WITH SURPRISING AGILITY.



MARCH 11, 1815: GEORGE COOPER DEFEATS TOM IN 20 MINUTES. TOM NEVER FIGHTS AGAIN.



1816: RETIRED FROM THE RING, TOM TRAVELS THROUGH SCOTLAND, EARNING HIS LIVING WITH PUBLIC SPARRING EXHIBITIONS.



1811: TOM STRUGGLES WITH HIS TRAINING. HE ALSO LABORS AGAINST DEPRESSION, RACIAL PREJUDICE, NATIONALISTIC JINGOISM, AND OPINIONS OF "JEALOUSY, ENVY, AND DISGUST." ON MAY 21, 1811, HE OVERCOMES THE DISRUPTIONS OF A RACIST AND RIOTOUS MOB TO DEFEAT A LANCASHIRE MAN, NAMED RIMMER, IN 21 ROUNDS.

BACK IN AUCHINEUX, FULLER'S NOSE IS SMASHED ("PEPPERED"), AND THE BLOOD ("CRIMSON") FLOWS IN "UNUSUAL QUANTITIES."

IT IS STILL THE FIRST ROUND.

1817: A RETIRED TOM CRIBB OPENS A TAVERN, HAVING QUIT HIS JOB AS A COAL MERCHANT. IN 1821, HE WILL BE HONORED AS ONE OF 18 BOXERS CHOSEN TO SERVE IN THE CORONATION OF GEORGE IV.



DECEMBER 18, 1810: MOLEINEUX FIGHTS CRIBB FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF ENGLAND. A "FEROCIOUS AND SANGUINARY" FIGHT, THE BOXERS PUMMEL EACH OTHER SO BADLY THAT THEIR ONLY DISTINGUISHING FEATURE IS THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN. CRIBB'S VICTORY, AFTER 39 ROUNDS, IS DUBIOUS, AT BEST ("INDEBTED TO GOOD FORTUNE").

ROUND ONE ENDS AS FULLER KNOCKS DOWN TOM. THE ROUND, TAKING 28 MINUTES, THRILLS THE UNDERGROUND SPORTING SET ("THE FANCY"), AND IS HAILED AS "UNPRECEDENTED."

TOM TRAVELS TO IRELAND, WHERE HIS "CERTAIN OLD PROPENSITIES" EXHAUST HIS BODY AND DESTROY HIS REMAINING HEALTH.



1810: MOLINEAUX DEBUTS IN LONDON, UTTERLY DESTROYING AND DISMANTLING HIS FIRST TWO OPPONENTS. HE AGITATES TO FIGHT THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY, AND LONDONERS, ASTOUNDED BY HIS SKILLS, PHYSIQUE, AND BRASH PRETENSIONS, QUICKLY GIVE HIM HIS WISH: A FIGHT WITH THE ENGLISH CHAMPION, TOM CRIBB.



THE SECOND ROUND BEGINS IN AUCHINEUX, DEFYING DESCRIPTION AND SHOWING OFF EVERY "MINUTIA OF THE MILLING ART." FULLER GIVES THE FIGHT OF HIS LIFE, AND TOM BATTLES BACK WITH THE LAST ECHOES OF HIS FORMER MASTERY.



1818: ALCOHOLIC AND DESTITUTE, TOM SURVIVES ON THE CARE AND ATTENTION OF THREE BLACK SOLDIERS OF THE 77TH REGIMENT.



1784: TOM MOLINEAUX IS BORN IN AMERICA. SAID TO BE A SLAVE, HE WILL LEAVE THE COUNTRY OF HIS BIRTH AND SEEK HIS DESTINY ABROAD. HE ARRIVES IN LONDON, "UNKNOWN, UNNOTICED, UNPROTECTED, AND UNINFORMED."



THE FIGHT ENDS. FULLER GETS PROHIBITED ASSISTANCE IN THE RING, AND TOM CLAIMS VICTORY ON THE FOUL. THE TWO ROUNDS LAST 68 MINUTES IN TOTAL, AND COST FULLER AN ESTIMATED TWO QUARTS OF BLOOD.

THE FIGHT, TOM'S FINAL WIN, IS CALLED "ONE OF THE MOST NOUVELLE SPECIMENS OF ENGLISH PRIZE FIGHTING THAT EVER OCCURRED."



AUGUST 4, 1818: TOM DIES, IN IRELAND, LOSING AT LAST TO THE "UNIVERSAL LEVeller." HE IS 34 YEARS OLD.



Not-So-Funny Pages Excerpt:

Levitation: Physics and Psychology in the Service of Deception

Jim Ottaviani

The science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke once proposed three laws for sorting through predictions of the future. The third is the most famous, for good reason: “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

It’s a “magic” that can wear off fairly quickly, once the audience grasps that technology. But for historians of science, it’s a useful reminder of why people believe what their experience of the world tells them shouldn’t be true. And as such, it’s a damn good guide to the history of prestidigitation: stage magic.

Clarke’s law comes quickly to writer Jim Ottaviani when asked why he and the artist Janine Johnston made *Levitation: Physics and Psychology in the Service of Deception*, a comic book history about the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century illusionists that invented, stole, and perfected one of the greatest tricks ever performed on stage: the levitating woman.

Ottaviani, a former nuclear plant operator and current librarian at the University of Michigan, turned to telling scientific history in comic book form after reading Richard Rhodes’s *The Making of the Atomic Bomb*. He and his many artistic collaborators have since delivered a steady stream of award-winning, New York Review of Books-praised fare, like his most recent work *Feynman*, about the famed Nobel-winning, Challenger-debunking, bongo-playing, Manhattan Project physicist. His next book, *Primates: The Fearless Science of Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birute Galdikas*, drawn by Maris Wicks, comes out this June.

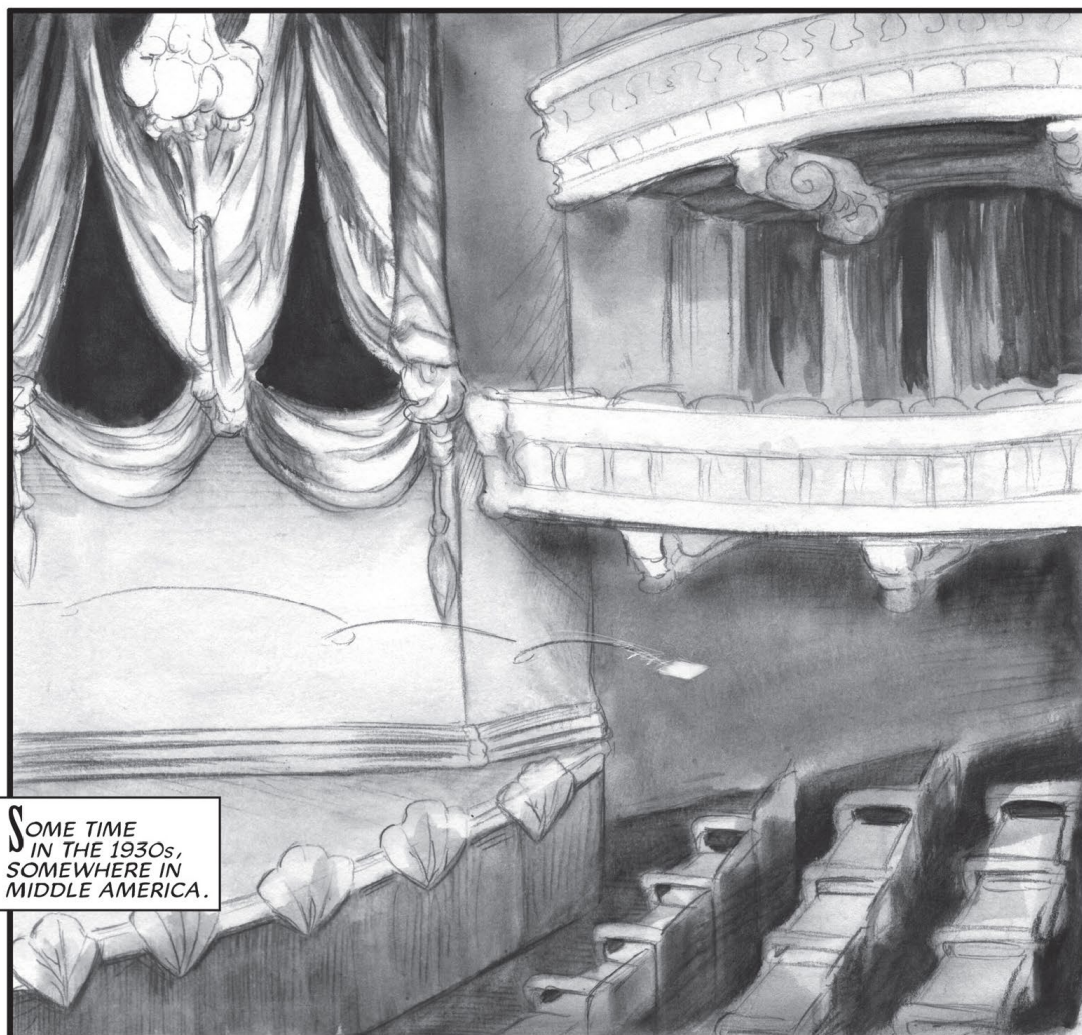
Still, Ottaviani doesn’t feel like he strayed from ‘hard’ science to write *Levitation*. “Throughout the history of magic, science and technology that was not yet widely understood was used to baffle and amaze people,” he writes.

Ottaviani believes that the explanatory power of *Levitation*, like his other work, begins with his background in engineering: the ability to take “things—be they theories or stories—apart to find out how they work or where they came from and [put] them back together via pictures.” He’s quick to add, however, that readers don’t see his script, “so the success of a story hinges 100% on the skill of the artist every time.” The artist on *Levitation*, Johnston, sells the story with excellent face and body work, fin de siècle scenery, and, most importantly, the ability to convey both the physics, process, and wonder behind the levitation trick.

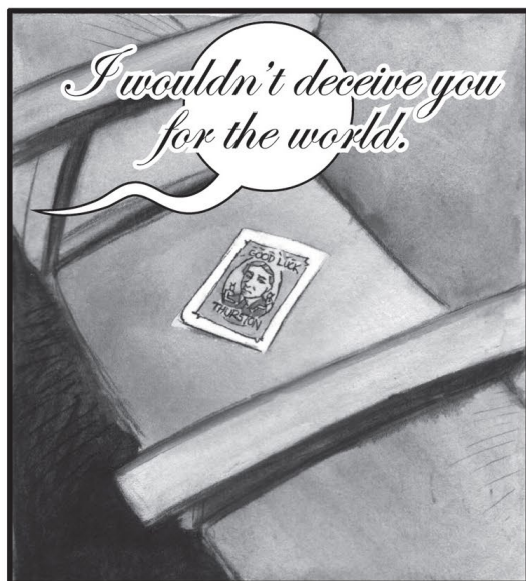
Levitation is an excellent piece of storytelling and explanation, delivered from the perspective of the stagehands that suffered the 1930s magician Howard Thurston. According to Thurston’s predecessor in the levitation trick, Harry Kellar, Thurston broke the illusion by inviting audience members up on stage to examine it. But did Thurston ruin the trick? Or did he just demonstrate another layer of its power?

We’re excited to excerpt its opening pages in this issue of *The Appendix*—and we should add, if you’re wondering, the full text doesn’t stint on the reveal.





SOME TIME
IN THE 1930s,
SOMEWHERE IN
MIDDLE AMERICA.



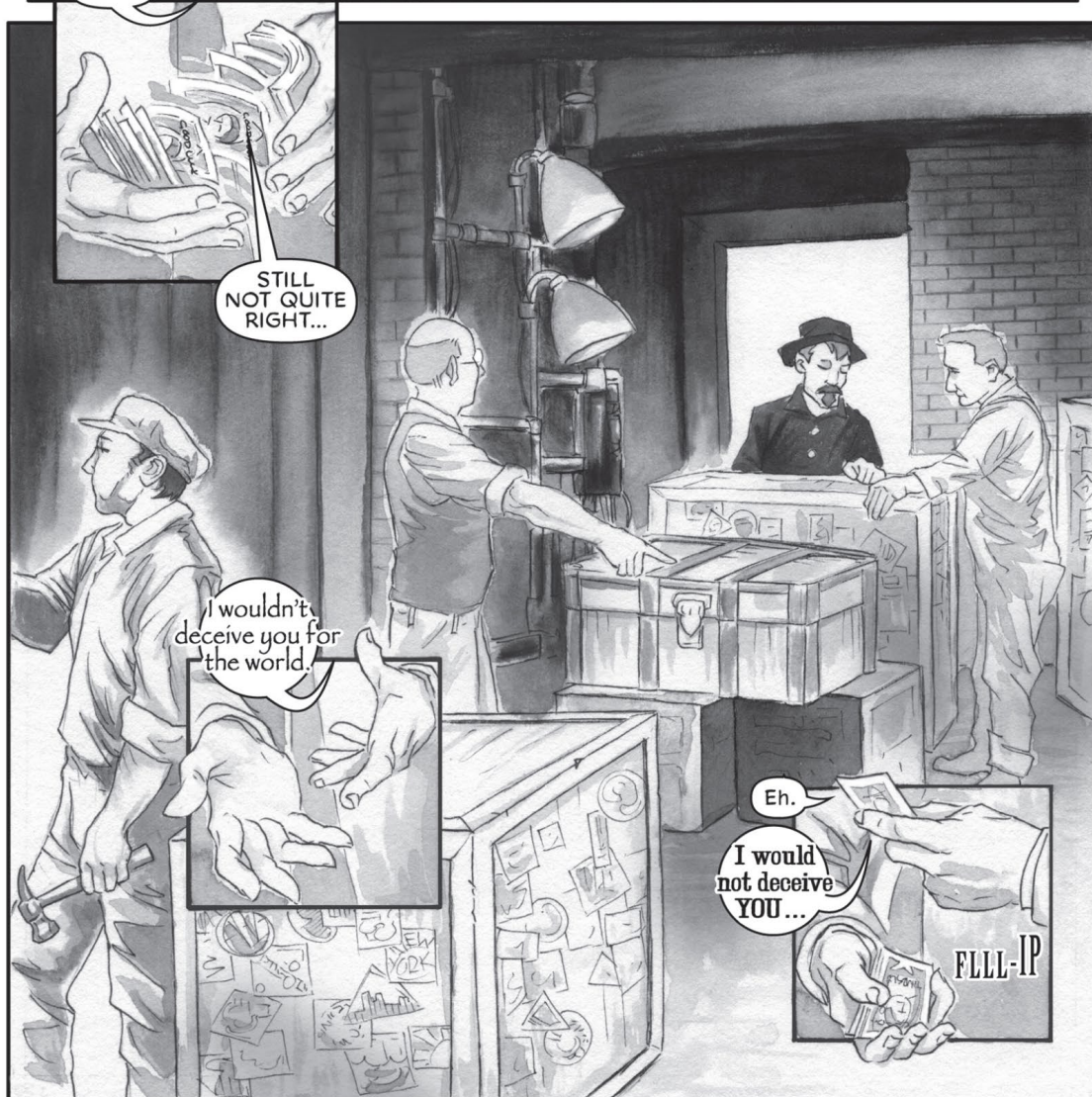
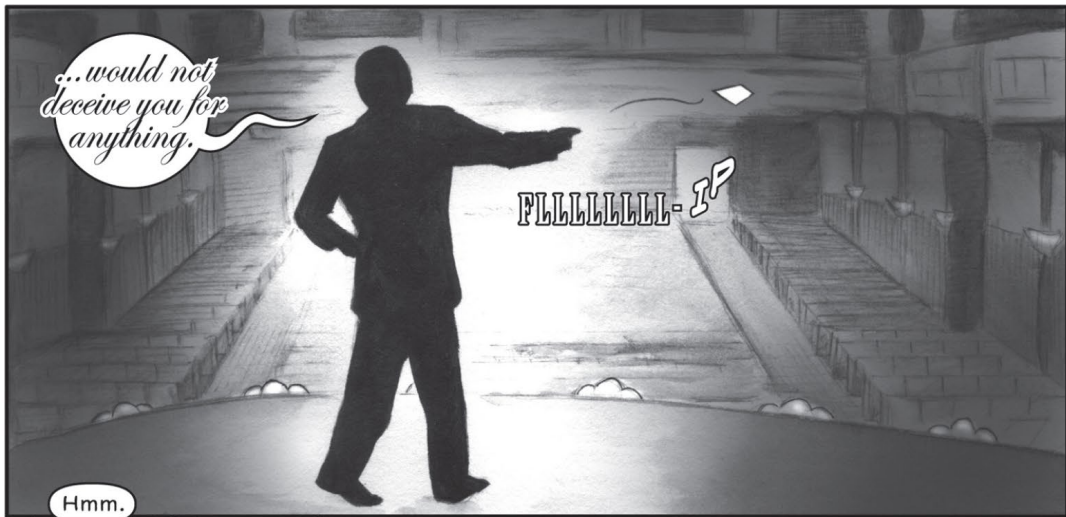
*I wouldn't deceive you
for the world.*

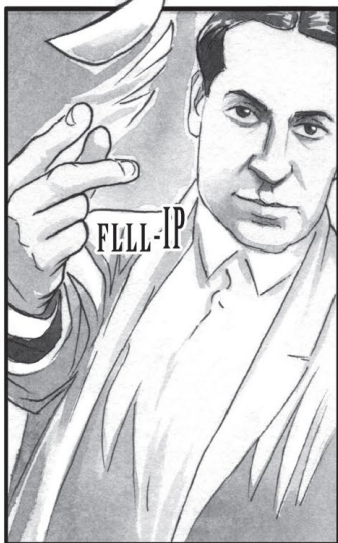
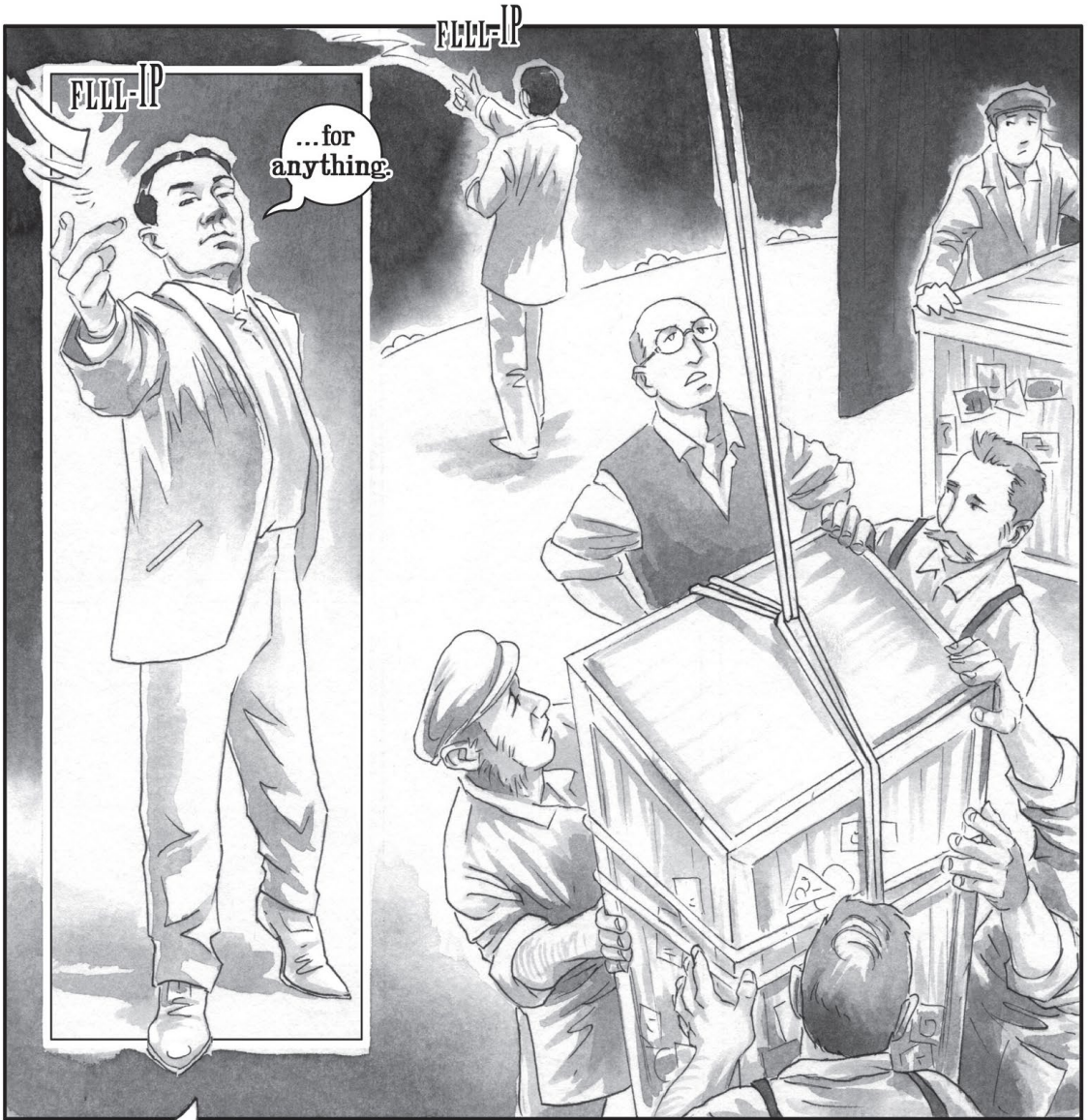


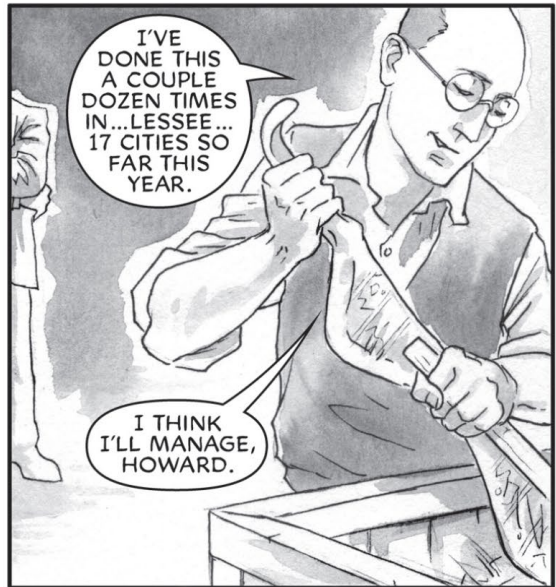
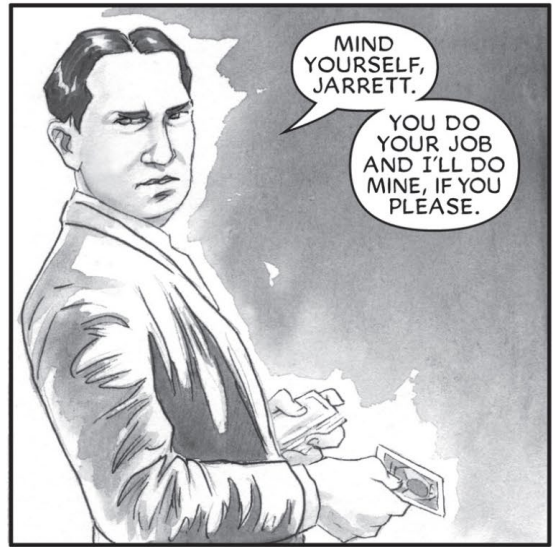
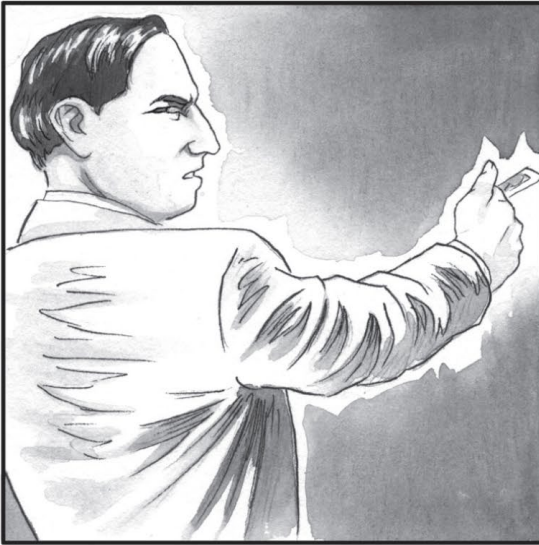
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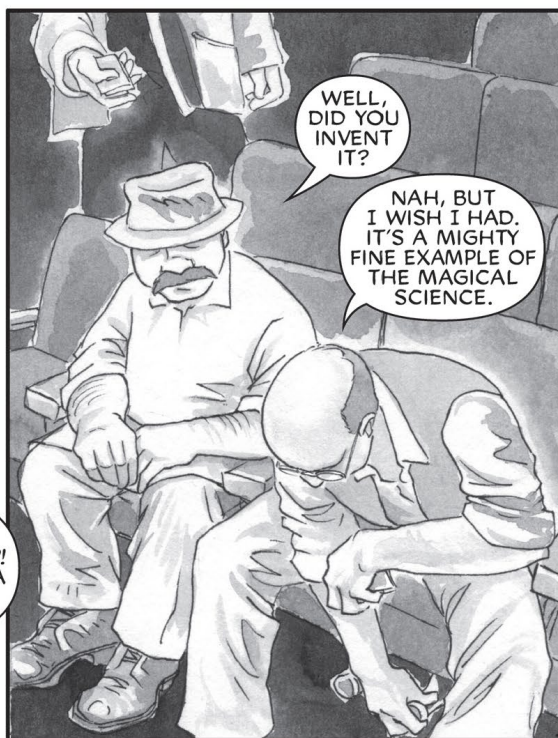
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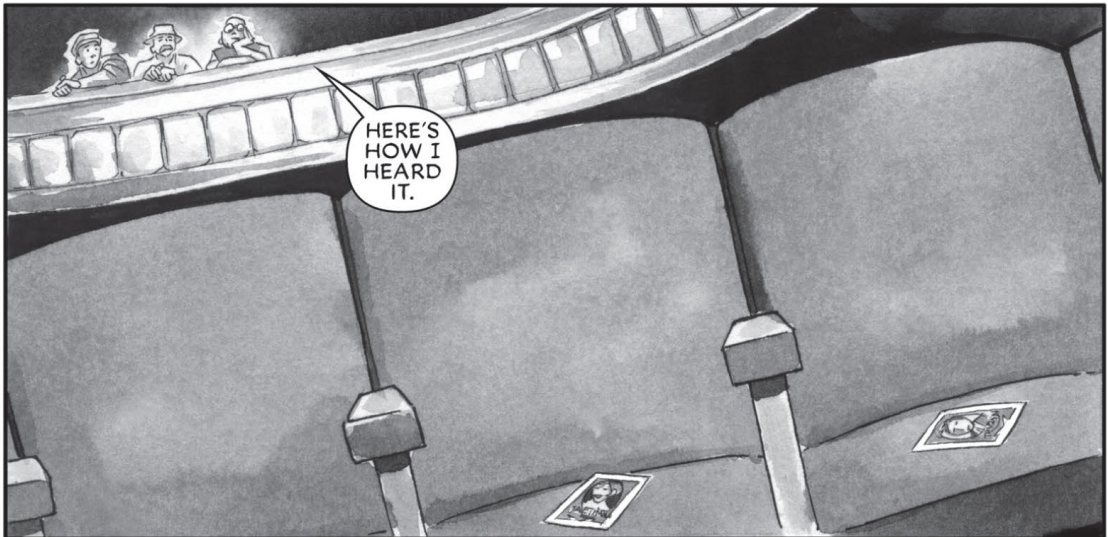
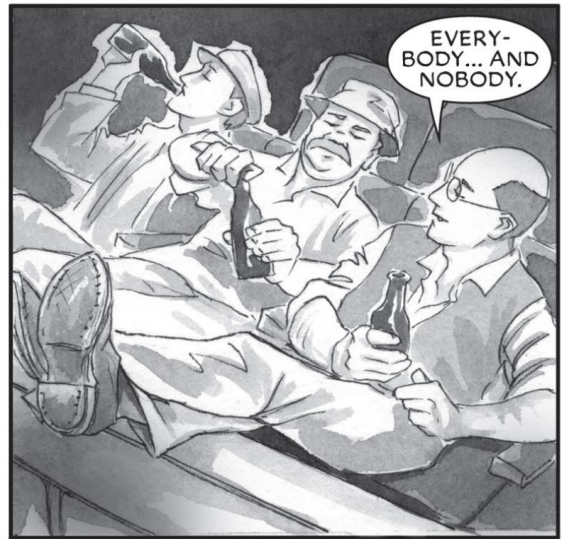


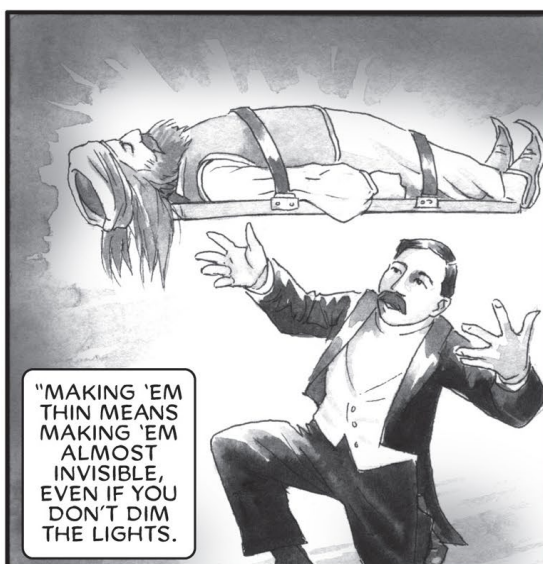
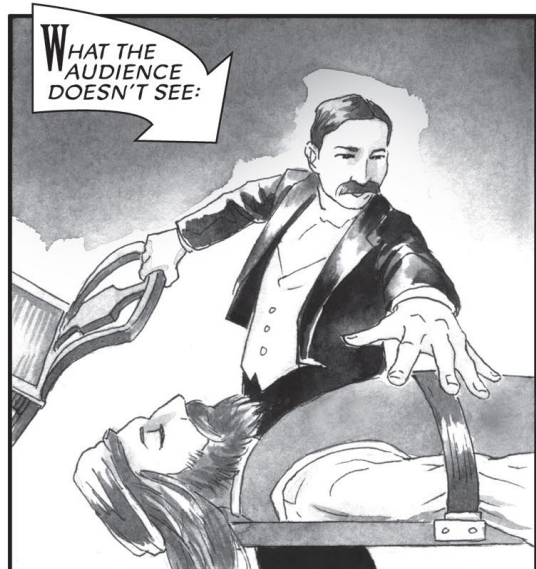
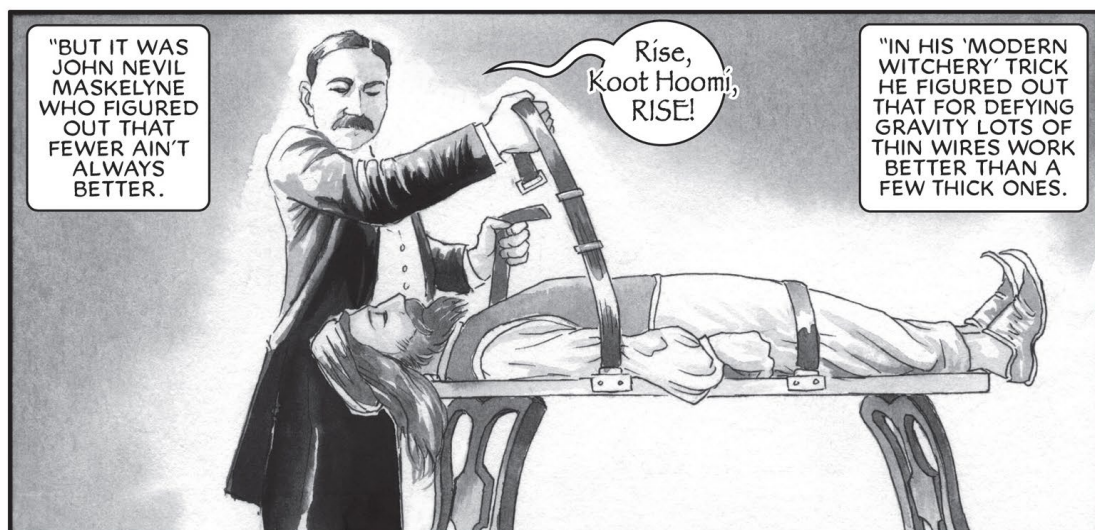


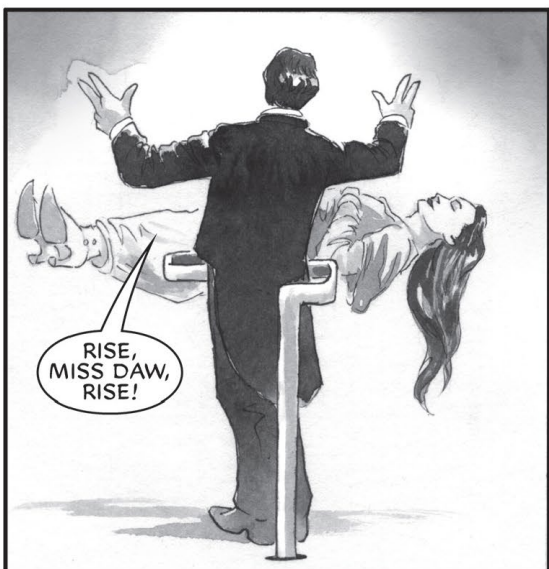


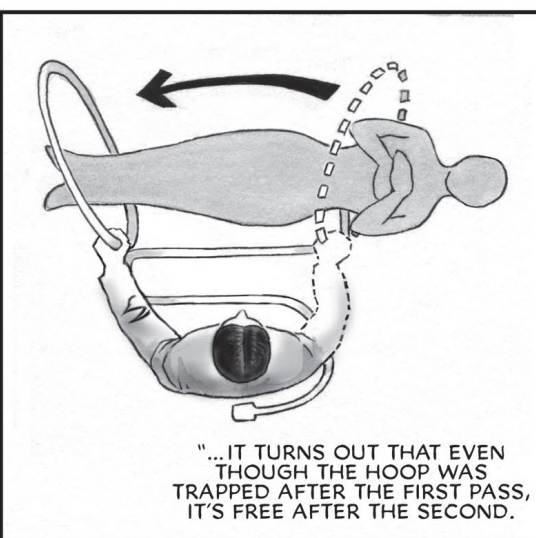
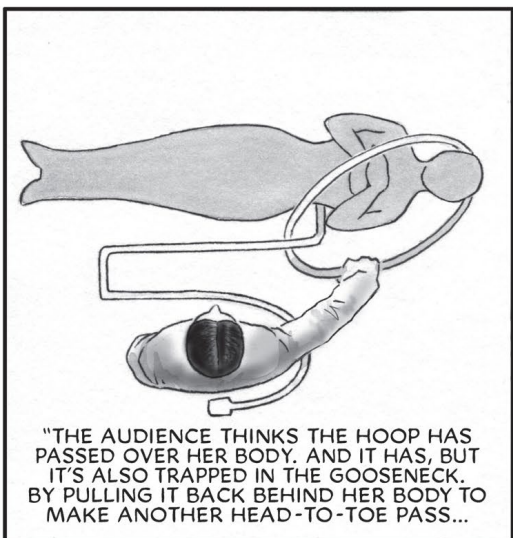
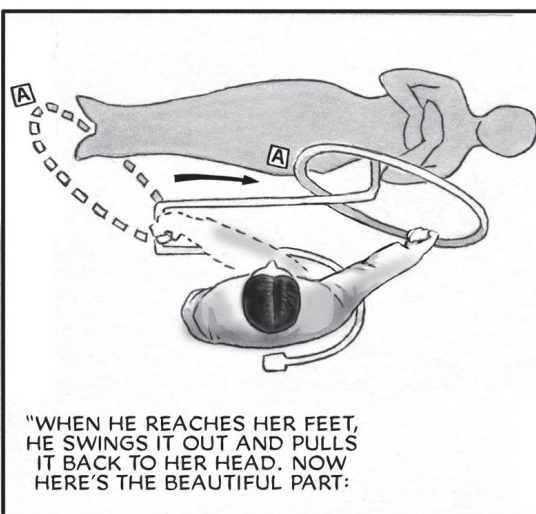
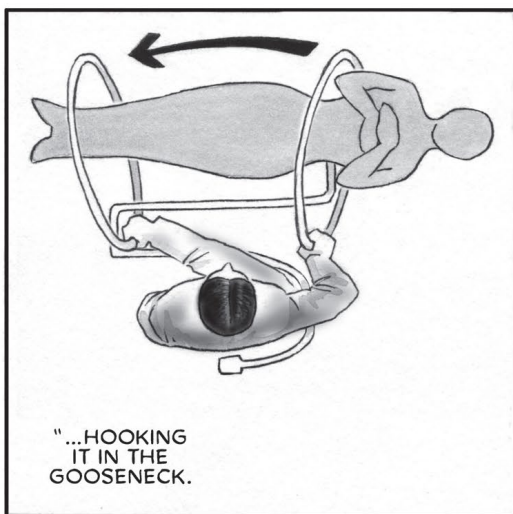
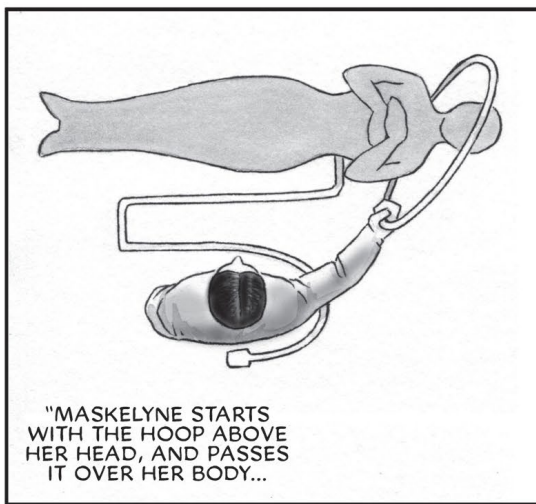
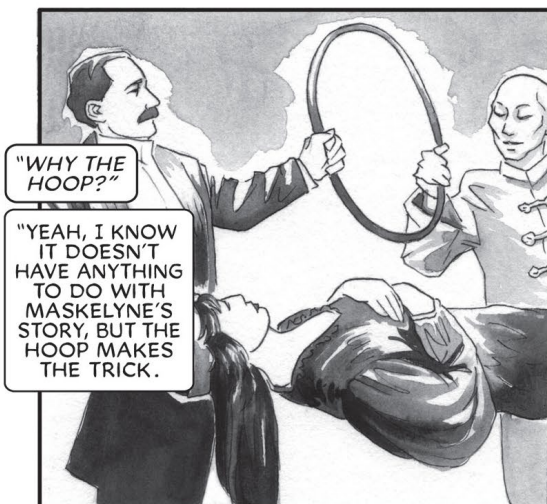




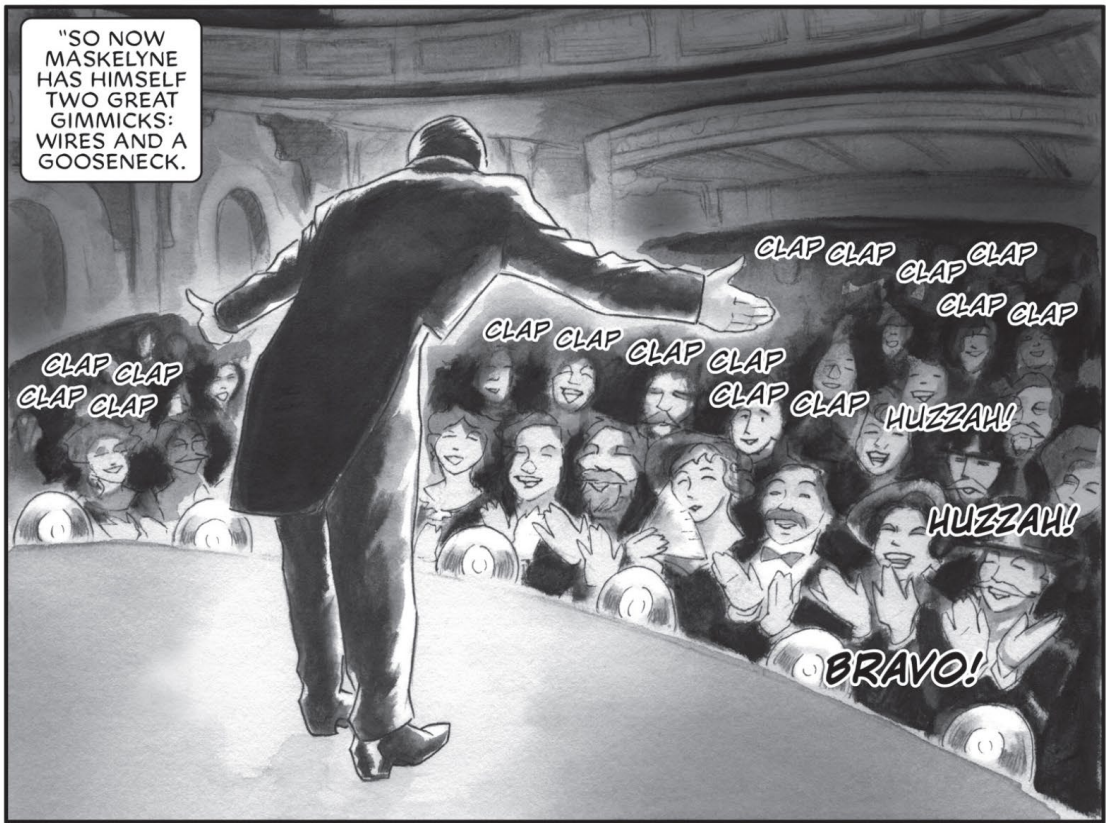








"SO NOW
MASKELYNE
HAS HIMSELF
TWO GREAT
GIMMICKS:
WIRES AND A
GOOSENECK.



CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP

CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP

CLAP CLAP CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP

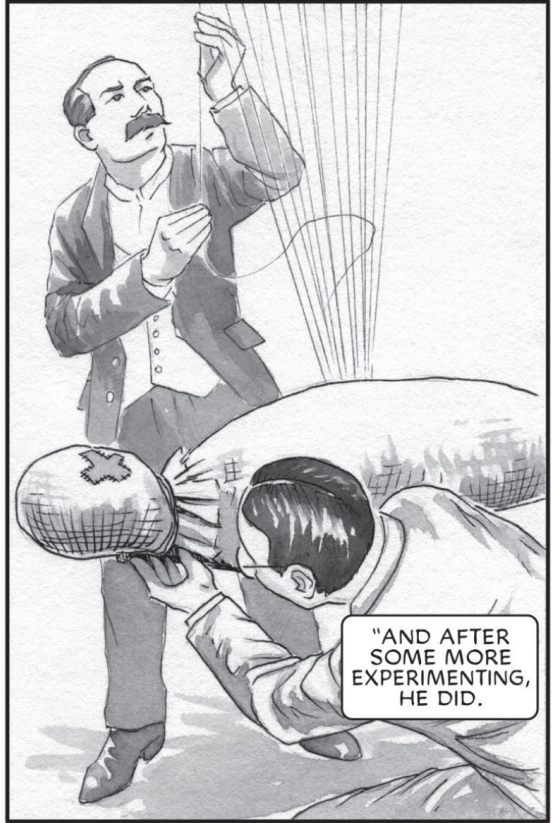
HUZZAH!

HUZZAH!

BRAVO!



"THE TRICK
WAS
PUTTIN' 'EM
TOGETHER.



"AND AFTER
SOME MORE
EXPERIMENTING,
HE DID.

The Appendix Appendixed.

By Benjamin Breen

The Universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries...When it was announced that the Library contained all books, the first reaction was unbounded joy. All men felt themselves to be possessors of an intact and secret treasure. There was no personal problem, no world problem, whose eloquent solution did not exist—somewhere in some hexagon. The universe was justified; the universe suddenly became congruent with the unlimited width and breadth of humankind's hope.—Borges

Since the web is always text searchable, there's less need for a guide that lists every proper name or noun. But there is a place for a system that gets more creative. Below are some selections from *The Appendix's* new index, which will debut online in the summer of 2013.

Bald eagle, giddiness induced by really touching one (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*, paragraph 2).

Banditry, and assorted misdeeds (*Fourth Skull*, paragraphs 47-51); with a heroic end (*Fourth Skull*, paragraph 53).

Dwarves, baked into pies (*Jepp, Who Defied the Stars*, paragraph 51); sharing sleeping quarters with a moose (*Jepp, Who Defied the Stars*, paragraph 106).

Fakirs, strolling, in Civil War era New York (reminiscence of) (*Letters to the Editor*, paragraph 5).

Ghosts, hungry ones (*Women in Green*, paragraph 34); of words (*Phantom Punch*, paragraph 72). See HALLUCINATIONS.

Gramophone, pedantic instructions regarding use (*Letters to the Editor*, paragraph 10).

Hallucinations, induced in the mind of a young Oliver Sacks by morphine (*Letter from the Editors*, paragraph 1); caused by sailors' encounter with far-northern climes (*Spectral Passages*, paragraph 22).

Laughter, of recognition (*Interview*, paragraph 47); making a terrible stammer even worse (*Woman Filing Her Nails*, paragraph 11); by Hollywood studio executives at the character of "Highpockets, a shiftless layabout" (*Phantom Punch*, paragraph 10).

Legerdemain, wonderful feats of (*Letters to the Editor*, paragraph 5); exposed to view (*Levitation*, panel 7). See FAKIRS.

Magic, interpenetration with religion (*Bespelled*, paragraphs 8-9).

Man-bats, hypothetical existence on the surface of the moon (*The Hoaxers*, paragraphs 39-44). See MOON.

Maps, contradictory navigation (*Spectral Passages*, paragraph 25); fictitious land mass (*Spectral Passages*, paragraph 26); and the magnetic North Pole (*Spectral Passages*, paragraph 27).

Moon, hypothetical collision with earth leading to destruction of Atlantis (*Andean Atlantis*, paragraph 24).

Nahuas, in Paris (*Fourth Skull*, paragraphs 16-26).

Ornate Fruitdove, resemblance of its cries to the weeping of men and women (*Anthropology*, Footnoted, paragraph 23).

Sailors, enslaved in Tunisia (*The Many Lives of Ned Coxere*, paragraph 5); their tendency toward mutiny (*Spectral Passages*, paragraph 32); their confidence regarding sighting of mermaids (*Spectral Passages*, paragraph 32); stealing money from the captain (*Lieutenant Nun*, paragraph 19).

Skulls, drilled vertically, not horizontally as in Aztec temple racks (*Fourth Skull*, paragraph 22).

Twins, conjoined (*Showing His Monster*, *passim*).

Women, cross-dressing and seducing other women (*Lieutenant Nun*, paragraph 19); giving birth to rabbits (*Mother Machine*, paragraph 4); vanishing in store display (*The Lady Vanishes*, paragraph 1).

* Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.

How do we order what we've learned of the world?

René Descartes was among the first to diagnose the problem faced by readers of his generation:

Even if all knowledge could be found in books, where it is mixed in with so many useless things and confusingly heaped in such large volumes, it would take longer to read those books than we have to live in this life and more effort to select the useful things than to find them oneself.

Descartes, with characteristic sass, decided that it was better to throw out books and start from scratch than to spend a lifetime poring through them.

Jorge Luis Borges reached a different conclusion. In 1941, he imagined a "Library of Babel" that contained every book that could possibly exist: histories of the future, "autobiographies of archangels," lost gnostic gospels, "the treatise Bede could have written (but did not)" even "the true story of your death." And dwarfing all of these works, Borges envisioned a universe-worth of endless nonsense, jumbled texts without coherence. A book that repeats the letters M C and V over and over. A book of utter gibberish surrounding one phrase at its center: "O Time thy pyramids."

Although the library initially seems to be a blessing to humankind, it breeds violence and madness: "thousands of greedy individuals abandoned their sweet native hexagons," writes Borges. "These pilgrims squabbled in the narrow corridors, muttered dark imprecations, strangled one another on the divine staircases, threw deceiving volumes down ventilation shafts."

The problem was this: although, somewhere in the endless branching hexagons of books there existed a "faithful catalog of the Library," no one knew its location. Nor, even were it to be found, could the true index to the library's contents be reliably distinguished from the "thousands of false catalogs." As law professor James Grimmelman notes Borges's Library of Babel is "a pure and perfect example of information overload."

For Borges the librarian, the problem wasn't too many books, or too large an accumulation of data, but not having a good index.

On the occasion of attempting an index for our own articles, we at *The Appendix* grappled with the problem presented by Borges's library. To paraphrase Carl Sagan, "If you wish to make an index from scratch, you must first invent the universe."

Indexing isn't just about recording what belongs in which category, dryly quantifying and tabulating like the Charles Dickens tutor Gradgrind, who insists that his students define a horse.*

Creating an index can be a work of imagination, a creative act. In deciding precisely what an object is, we also make an incremental step toward constructing our own mental universe, and the universes of those who interact with us.

Granted, the poetic nature of the index is not much in evidence nowadays. They run pretty dry in the twenty-first century, usually consisting of little more than a list of proper names and common nouns.

In the early decades of their existence, however, indices were quite a bit weirder. The "General Index" to William Dampier's 1697 *Voyages* distinguished between "Bells, musical, struck upon, 342" and "Bells, with claws, worshipt, 411." It classified both scorpions and tea as drugs, and contained individual entries for things like "Dew at night where it never rains" and "Burying alive, where and why." Dampier's index even contained miniature narratives: the entry for 'Night' continued on with "Singing and Dancing then usual," "Fires then seen," and "Drum heard."

Likewise, the sheer exuberance of early modern attempts to categorize and index exhibit a sort of poetic approach to understanding life. The title page of Rafael Bluteau's 1712 *Dictionario Portuguez e Latino* promised readers an almost surreal array of conceptual categories.†

This poetic approach to indexing is the one that has inspired us at *The Appendix*.

† Economic, Qualitative, Mathematic, Dogmatic, Fruit-related, Xenophonic, Quidditative

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